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77th plenary meeting
Tuesday, 18 January 2005, 10.30 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Ping ..... (Gabon)

The meeting was called to order at 10.40 a.m.

Agenda item 113 (*continued*)

Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations (A/59/668)

The President (*spoke in French*): I should like, in keeping with established practice, to draw the attention of the General Assembly to document A/59/668, containing a letter from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the General Assembly, in which he informs the Assembly that 29 Member States are in arrears in the payment of their financial contributions to the United Nations within the terms of Article 19 of the Charter.

I should like to remind delegations that, under Article 19 of the Charter,

> "A Member of the United Nations which is in arrears in the payment of its financial contributions to the Organization shall have no vote in the General Assembly if the amount of its arrears equals or exceeds the amount of the contributions due from it for the preceding two full years."

May I take it that the General Assembly duly takes note of the information contained in document A/59/668?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 8 (*continued*)

Organization of work, adoption of the agenda and allocation of items

The President (*spoke in French*): Members will recall that the General Assembly concluded its consideration of agenda item 39 at its 75th plenary meeting, on 22 December 2004. As indicated in the footnote to document A/59/L.58, in order that the Assembly may consider the draft resolution before it, it will be necessary to reopen consideration of agenda item 39. May I take it that the Assembly wishes to resume its consideration of agenda item 39?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 39 (*continued*)

Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance

Draft resolution (A/59/L.58)

The President (*spoke in French*): In order that the General Assembly may take a speedy decision on the draft resolution, unless I hear any objection I shall take it that the Assembly wishes immediately to proceed to its consideration of agenda item 39.

It was so decided.

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05-21088 (E)

The President (*spoke in French*): The General Assembly will therefore now consider agenda item 39, entitled "Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance".

The Assembly is today resuming its work in an atmosphere of sorrow following the earthquake and the resulting tsunami that struck South and South-East Asia and part of the coast of Africa along the Indian Ocean on 26 December. According to figures that unfortunately remain provisional, over 175,000 people were killed — half of whom were children — and 1 million persons have been displaced, with 5 million injured and immeasurable ecological damage. I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate my most sincere condolences to the families of the victims, Governments and peoples of the States so tragically affected.

The frequency and scope of catastrophes in recent years — from the Mediterranean to the Caribbean, and from Africa to Asia — now more than ever call upon us to provide assistance, as well as once again attesting to the need to coordinate humanitarian assistance and establish a worldwide early warning mechanism. We should welcome the exceptional manner in which the international community has mobilized itself to deal with the tragedy in the Indian Ocean. I hope that all pledges made will be honoured, with a view to assisting affected countries as they endeavour to recover. I would once again like to welcome the decisive role being played daily by the United Nations to coordinate and manage international humanitarian assistance.

Although it is true that we cannot always predict how nature will change, we can nevertheless today adopt the necessary measures to anticipate changes and manage their destructive effects. In that connection, the World Conference on Disaster Reduction, which opened today in Kobe, Japan, is a timely event.

I am pleased that the draft resolution put forth by the Lao People's Democratic Republic on behalf of the countries of the Association of South-East Asian Nations emphasizes in particular the need to step up our efforts to provide the United Nations with an efficient mechanism to coordinate efforts by the international community to provide emergency humanitarian assistance as well as disaster-related early warning, prevention and mitigation. I am convinced that, by adopting the draft resolution, we will be taking a decisive step towards achieving that essential goal.

I now call on the Secretary-General.

The Secretary-General: Let me thank the General Assembly, and in particular the Group of Asian States, for making this meeting possible. Above all, let me once more offer my condolences to the countries affected by the tsunami disaster, and pay tribute to their people for the courage and solidarity they have displayed over the past three weeks. I return from the region proud to be a member of humankind.

On the morning of 26 December 2004, a word that most of us had never used before took on a universal and terrifying meaning. In the space of seven hours, the onslaught of the tsunami had struck 12 countries across two continents. The total death toll now stands at almost 160,000 — half of them children, as we heard the President of the General Assembly note earlier. That figure is likely to rise. At least 27,000 people are still missing. More than 1 million have been displaced. Another million are homeless. Roads, bridges, schools and hospitals have been destroyed or swept away. And let us not forget the thousands of nationals from dozens of other countries around the world who also perished in the tragedy.

I have just returned from a tour of three of the most affected countries: Indonesia, where the cost in human life was by far the most catastrophic; Sri Lanka, which also suffered massive human losses as well as the destruction of key parts of its economy; and the Maldives, where one third of the population was directly affected and several islands have been rendered uninhabitable. I have seen mile after mile of desolation, where once vibrant communities suddenly ceased to exist. I have looked into the eyes of fishermen whose silence expressed their loss as no words could. I have seen families torn asunder, mothers inconsolable, livelihoods gone. But I have also seen examples of the best that humankind has to offer.

The Governments of affected countries moved quickly to do their part, with civil society and the private sector joining forces with them. Communities organized themselves spontaneously, reaching out to their neighbours, without waiting to be told what to do. In Aceh I met displaced persons being sheltered in the best buildings — government houses and schools —

instead of being left to fend for themselves on the margins of society. In Sri Lanka I met families being housed and cared for in a mosque, whatever their religion or ethnicity. In the Maldives I met islanders who had been spared the direct impact of the emergency working day and night to help their fellow islanders in need.

And if that natural disaster was without parallel or precedent, so was the international response. Neighbouring countries, whether affected or not, went to the aid of those hardest hit. Singapore and Malaysia, India and Thailand, provided early and crucial assistance to Indonesia and Sri Lanka, and continue to do so. Governments around the world offered pledges and contributions in an outpouring of compassion. More than 60 countries have pledged assistance so far. The Core Group and other countries with military assets in the region provided essential logistical support for the humanitarian effort.

The United Nations mobilized itself early and quickly. I am sure I speak for all of us in thanking Jan Egeland, the Humanitarian Emergency Relief Coordinator, and Margareta Wahlström, our special coordinator in the region — as well as Carol Bellamy of UNICEF, Jim Morris of the World Food Programme and Ruud Lubbers, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees — for the leadership they have demonstrated since Day One. Above all, I thank our men and women in the field for the wonderful job they are doing in difficult circumstances. Our United Nations country teams, led by the Resident Coordinators, were joined within 24 hours of the disaster by United Nations disaster assessment and coordination teams. They combined their efforts with the Governments affected, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and other non-governmental organizations, as well as with countries deploying military assets.

As part of the response, leaders from the region came together in Jakarta to discuss the relief and reconstruction effort. They agreed that the United Nations should coordinate that work. The Core Group, by unanimous agreement, is being folded into the activities of the United Nations. The collaboration between us has been excellent.

In Jakarta I also launched a flash appeal for $977 million to cover the humanitarian emergency needs of an estimated 5 million people in five countries. In response, there have been generous pledges and, more importantly, some firm commitments. Official pledges now stand at $739 million — more than 75 per cent of what we asked for. I fervently hope those pledges will be converted into cash as soon as possible. There has also been an unprecedented response worldwide from the general public and the private sector, whose contributions now total almost $1 billion.

We are determined to live up to the trust of our donors. PriceWaterhouseCooper is working with us to strengthen existing financial tracking systems and ensure transparency in the use of funds donated for the flash appeal.

Today we can say with some confidence that the humanitarian response is on track. The World Food Programme is feeding more than 300,000 people. The World Health Organization is providing technical support for water, nutrition, sanitation, immunization and women's health, while monitoring for communicable diseases. So far, no major outbreaks have been reported. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is providing shelter, while UNICEF has shipped tons of educational materials to help children get back to school as quickly as possible.

At the same time, the long-term challenges are considerable. We know from experience that the poor always suffer the most enduring damage from such natural disasters, as their assets are often completely wiped out. We therefore need to focus on longer-term recovery and reconstruction and ensure that from now on there are no gaps in the funding effort.

The World Bank, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme and international and regional financial institutions, is already working to determine rehabilitation and reconstruction needs and is exploring ways to address them. As called for at the Jakarta meeting, I will name a special envoy by the end of the week to liaise with Governments in affected countries, ensure coordination of the response and encourage the world community to remain engaged for the longer term.

The generosity and support we have seen over the past few weeks have set a new standard for our global community. It is my hope that we will find a way of capturing this moment, nurturing this spirit and bringing it to bear in other crises around the world. I hope we will unite around it to heal old wounds and

long-running conflicts. I hope we will seize it as an opportunity and a reminder to address other emergencies. I hope we will hold to it as a measure of our humanity.

The President (*spoke in French*): With regard to agenda item 39, the General Assembly has before it draft resolution A/59/L.58. I now call on the representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic to introduce the draft resolution on behalf of Association of South-East Asian Nations.

Mr. Kittikhoun (Lao People's Democratic Republic): I have the honour to introduce the draft resolution entitled "Strengthening emergency relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and prevention in the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster" on behalf of the member countries of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) — namely, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Viet Nam and my own country, the Lao People's Democratic Republic — as well as the following sponsors: Algeria, Andorra, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belarus, Belgium, Bhutan, Bolivia, Canada, China, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Djibouti, Egypt, Estonia, Finland, France, Gabon, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, Haiti, Hungary, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ireland, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Latvia, Liberia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Maldives, Mali, Malta, Mauritius, Mexico, Monaco, Mongolia, Morocco, Nepal, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Norway, Pakistan, Peru, Poland, Portugal, the Republic of Korea, Romania, the Russian Federation, San Marino, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovenia, Somalia, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tajikistan, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Timor-Leste, Tunisia, Turkmenistan, Turkey, the United Kingdom, Uruguay, Uzbekistan and Yemen.

The earthquake and tsunami of 26 December 2004 was an unprecedented global catastrophe requiring an unprecedented global response. A disaster of that magnitude had never been experienced in the 60 years of the existence of the United Nations. That led ASEAN to request the resumption of this session of the General Assembly to mark our remembrance of the victims and to voice a common expression of condolence. The scale of the calamity also prompted ASEAN leaders to convene a special meeting in Jakarta on 6 January 2005, where they were joined by heads of Government and leaders of many countries and international organizations, including the United Nations, to seek to work together to respond to the urgent and immediate needs of communities severely affected by the earthquake and tsunami.

Against that backdrop, and on behalf of the member countries of ASEAN, I wish to take this opportunity to express our profound appreciation to the peoples and Governments represented here, as well as to non-governmental organizations and the citizens of the world for their tremendous outpouring of support and assistance in the aftermath of this calamity. ASEAN wholeheartedly expresses its gratitude for the prompt and strong support — moral, financial and otherwise — of the Governments, civil society, private sector and individuals of the international community to help affected countries to get back on their feet. The swift response of the international community and its continued support to those affected have indeed reflected the spirit of compassion and international solidarity in times of humanitarian catastrophes caused by severe natural disasters.

ASEAN also wishes to thank the Secretary-General for his direct and personal initiative to launch the Indian Ocean earthquake/tsunami 2005 flash appeal in Jakarta, which received an overwhelming response in Jakarta and at the ministerial-level meeting on humanitarian assistance to tsunami affected communities, which was held in Geneva on 11 January.

ASEAN commends the role of the United Nations — from the Secretary-General, at the very top, to Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Jan Egeland and Special Coordinator Margareta Wahlström and all the dedicated officials involved from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the World Food Programme, UNICEF and other agencies. We also commend other international organizations, including the International Red Cross, for their support for efforts of Governments of the affected countries to address the disaster.

In addressing the recovery and reconstruction efforts, ASEAN underlines the medium- and long-term social, economic and environmental impact of the disaster on affected States, which undoubtedly requires a sustainable and unwavering response. It was

exceptional for the international media to maintain its coverage of the long-term impact of the tsunami in order to hold the attention of the international community on the tsunami cause. Once media attention fades, the international community at large may mistakenly believe that life is back to normal for all the affected communities, although that reality is a long, long way off.

Similarly, the international community needs to maintain its focus beyond the current emergency relief effort, in order to sustain the political will to support the medium- and long-term rehabilitation, reconstruction and risk-reduction efforts led by the Governments of affected countries. To that end, the heads of State and Government meeting in Jakarta proposed that the Secretary-General appoint a special representative and convene an international conference to address the medium- and long-term rehabilitation and reconstruction needs of the affected countries.

The devastating tsunami indeed teaches us painful and valuable lessons. If we do not derive the priceless lessons to be learned from the catastrophe and if we fail to take concrete steps, we will face the possibility of having to deal with an even grimmer situation in the future. In that connection, I would like to highlight some of the salient lessons we should consider.

The first lesson is that we can all be affected by disasters and that disasters can affect entire regions and spare neither the life nor property of anyone. The tsunami has directly affected 12 countries in the Indian Ocean and South-East Asian region, claiming thousands of lives, including those of visitors from 40 nations around world, and causing indescribable material damage. No kind of calamity, actual or potential, should be ignored or neglected. Never before in modern history have we witnessed the devastating scale of destruction caused by a natural disaster affecting a very vast area.

Secondly, international, regional and national organizations must enhance their coordination efforts so as to minimize the casualties caused by natural disasters. Effective coordination is an essential element of disaster preparedness and response for the entire United Nations system and for Governments, international financial institutions and non-governmental organizations. Efforts need to be made to promote complementarities and avoid duplication.

The third lesson is that countries need to work together at the subregional, regional and international levels ahead of time, instead of waiting until disaster strikes to respond. In that regard, further strengthening the rapid-response capacities for immediate humanitarian relief efforts under the auspices of the United Nations, including through possible standby arrangements, is worth taking into account. The World Conference on Disaster Reduction in Kobe, Japan, is expected to look into those issues thoroughly with a view to recommending appropriate action.

In the same vein, ASEAN emphasizes the urgent need for the establishment of a regional early warning system, particularly for tsunamis, in the Indian Ocean and South-East Asian region and notes the interest expressed by some Governments, bodies and organizations, including the Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre, in supporting the establishment of that system as part of regional and global instruments on disaster management and emergency response. Furthermore, we welcome the proposed convening of a regional ministerial meeting on regional cooperation with regard to a tsunami early warning system, to be held in Thailand on 28 January.

Lastly, reducing risk depends on effective communication and information-sharing. Disasters have shown that, in the absence of an open dialogue, valuable information and research from technical sectors are of no use. We need to strengthen the link between the scientific institutions and the national and local authorities in order to improve our reaction to disasters and to avoid human, economic and social losses from disaster.

Bearing this in mind, I now turn to the draft resolution before the Assembly. We would like to thank all delegations that cooperated closely with ASEAN in a very brief time frame to prepare this important draft resolution, as well as all those that, by sponsoring the draft resolution, join ASEAN and affected countries in voicing their sentiments and exhortations.

The draft resolution we are introducing today is inspired by the Declaration on Action to Strengthen Emergency Relief, Rehabilitation, Reconstruction and Prevention in the Aftermath of the Earthquake and Tsunami Disaster of 26 December 2004, which was issued at the end of the special ASEAN leaders' meeting in Jakarta on 6 January.

Before concluding, I wish to refer to the seventh preambular paragraph, which should read as follows:

> "*Welcoming* the recent announcement by the Paris Club creditors that they will not expect debt payments from affected countries that request such forebearance until the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have made a full assessment of their reconstruction and financing needs as well as specific initiatives from countries on this issue."

The fifteenth preambular paragraph should read as follows:

> "*Noting* the outcome of the International Meeting to Review the Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States held in Mauritius, 10-14 January 2005."

Operative paragraph 14 should read as follows:

> "*Welcomes also* the fact that the World Conference on Disaster Reduction will discuss the issue of a global and regional tsunami early warning system as part of its agenda."

Regarding operative paragraphs 7 and 8, I would like to inform Member States that, as a result of intensive consultations between interested delegations, an agreed text has been reached, as seen in the present draft resolution now before the Assembly.

We in ASEAN share our leaders' belief that, through concerted efforts inspired by a spirit of compassion, we will prevail in overcoming this catastrophe and future catastrophes that may come our way. The draft resolution we present today is one of those instruments that will help us to prepare for the future.

Finally, ASEAN wishes to thank everyone for their support in turning up for this resumed General Assembly session and looks forward to their support of this important draft resolution, to be adopted by consensus.

Mr. Jenie (Indonesia): On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Indonesia and on behalf of those whose lives have been changed by the recent Indian Ocean tsunami, my delegation would like to thank you, Sir for this opportunity to address this resumed meeting of the fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly. The circumstances surrounding our meeting today emphatically underline its timeliness and relevance. In that regard, Indonesia associates itself with the statement made by the Permanent Representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, who spoke on behalf of the member countries of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Today's meeting comes on the heels of the most powerful submarine earthquake in recent memory off the coast of Sumatra on 26 December. While the death toll from that epic disaster is constantly being revised, it stands today at well over 160,000. Indonesia continues to calculate its human losses, mostly in its province of Aceh, which, to date, amount to more than 110,000. In addition, around 10,000 are missing and more than 700,000 displaced, their lives disrupted as they lost not only their homes, but, most sadly, their livelihood and are now living in temporary shelters.

However, we gratefully acknowledge that the challenge before us is not one that we face alone. In the face of this great human tragedy, all of us responded out of a profound sense of common humanity. There have been incredible demonstrations of love, compassion and deep caring from all quarters. There have also been large-scale aid donations and an unprecedented, extraordinary international response through humanitarian relief efforts.

At the head of all that is the United Nations, which has mobilized the international community to give generously and has been helping affected host countries to coordinate the relief efforts being provided. For that Indonesia sincerely expresses, through you, Mr. President, its deepest gratitude and appreciation. We join Secretary-General Kofi Annan in expressing the hope that this global outpouring of solidarity and generosity will be sustained in the long run.

While Indonesia is wholeheartedly grateful for the unwavering support and affection expressed by the international community, it is worth mentioning that people from all walks of life in Indonesia have also exhibited their full compassion and solidarity: from Adi, a student in elementary school in Solo who donated his piggybank savings, to Markus, a business man from North Sulawesi who sent boxes of food and blankets. The staff of Bank Indonesia donated their monthly salaries to their brothers and sisters in Aceh. Various individual and group initiatives — including

the voluntary assistance being provided by paramedics, as well as by consultants on children and construction workers from all over Indonesia — are being woven together to help rebuild Aceh. All of them are eagerly showing Indonesia's solidarity with their fellow countrymen in Aceh as members of Indonesia's big family.

While those relief efforts have returned some measure of normalcy to affected communities by ensuring the availability of various public facilities — such as health care, water and sanitation, education and other basic needs — it is important to note that such support must be maintained during the rehabilitation and reconstruction phases. Those elements of the restoration process require different approaches and facilities to adequately address the different needs of the victims, especially the 700,000 displaced persons in Aceh.

In that connection, efforts are being made involving the TNI — the Indonesian armed forces — local authorities, volunteers and the relevant United Nations agencies to set up 24 relocation centres to provide accommodation for the displaced. Those centres will logistically enable occupants to have greater access to humanitarian assistance. They will be set up in accordance with principles and requirements established by the United Nations and other humanitarian organizations and will involve various other stakeholders to ensure that an acceptable quality of life is possible in those facilities.

In collaboration with the United Nations, the Government has also established a joint disaster management centre in Jakarta in the Office of the Vice-President, Yusuf Kalla. The Coordinating Minister for People's Welfare is currently on the spot in Aceh coordinating relief operations. The main purpose of the centre is to assess needs and set priorities for the management and coordination of international relief efforts, which are expected to last for the next six to 12 months. That collaboration is intended to guarantee the proper and accountable management of aid from various national, regional and international resources.

To make certain that those communities are not subjected to a similar fate in the future, Indonesia firmly believes, as does the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), that a regional early-warning system should be put in place to prevent the huge loss of life and property that resulted from December's tsunami. We therefore fully support the proposal for a regional tsunami early-warning centre for the Indian Ocean and the South-East Asia region, one similar to the Pacific Ocean warning network based in Hawaii. Had such a system been in place, thousands of lives would have been saved.

Similarly, during the meeting of the ASEAN Standing Committee that is currently taking place in Jakarta, it has been proposed that there should be an ASEAN humanitarian rapid-response regional institutional capacity to speedily mobilize and deploy civilian and military personnel in addressing emergency situations in ASEAN countries. That initiative is indeed a concrete step to follow up the Jakarta declaration of 6 January 2005.

In conclusion, in the midst of its current difficult situation, Indonesia welcomes, and is undoubtedly thankful for, the support of the international community. That solidarity will not only stay in the heart and memory of every Indonesian, but even now is proving to be an invaluable resource in our efforts to deal with the disastrous effects of the tsunami. We must indeed make permanent the culture of international solidarity that has emerged in response to this great tragedy. Working together must become the hallmark of future international relations. As our President, Mr. Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, has said, "When the crisis has passed, let us not go back to business as usual, only to become a solid community again when another disaster strikes."

Mr. Goonatilleke (Sri Lanka): The fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly has been resumed to consider agenda item 39 in the wake of the deadly tsunami that struck several countries in the Indian Ocean region.

Being far away from the earthquake zone, Sri Lanka had little or no reason to worry about such natural disasters, which cause catastrophic damage to earthquake-prone countries. In the living memory of Sri Lanka, we had never experienced the ferocity of nature in the form of a tsunami. In fact, even the very terminology did not exist in our vocabulary until that fateful Sunday, 26 December.

Sri Lanka is situated thousands of miles away from the epicentre of the deadly volcanic upheaval that shook Banda Aceh on that fateful day. Despite that, the coastal areas of the northern, eastern, southern and south-western parts of our country absorbed the full

brunt of the tsunami, which killed over 159,000 persons in the region, injured tens of thousands and displaced millions of people living all the way up to the eastern coast of Africa.

By now the world is aware that Sri Lanka was the second-most-affected country, after Indonesia. While we have yet to come up with the final figures, according to statistics we now have we know that the wall of sea water rushing towards our shore that day took the lives of 38,195 persons. The final toll is expected to exceed 40,000 lives. That is a massive figure for a small country like ours. Among the dead were countless children, possibly over 12,000. The killer waves also orphaned well over 1,000 children and left another 3,202 children with one parent.

If that death toll is staggering, the situation of those who survived is equally disturbing. Today we have approximately more than half a million displaced persons in camps, schools and other makeshift structures. Those people lost practically everything they possessed. Consequently, providing shelter, food, clean water, sanitation and health care to such a vast number of persons, spread out over a wide area of our coastal region, has become a monumental task for the Government.

Given their dire circumstances and the fact that they have to live on hand-outs, the physically weakened displaced population is likely to fall victim to vector- and water-borne diseases. Consequently, while digging for the dead and cleaning up debris, we also have to empty wells supplying drinking water, disinfect them and make such sources of water safe to consume so that we can hold at bay such water-borne diseases as dysentery and cholera. However, thanks to measures taken by the authorities concerned, we have succeeded in preventing an outbreak of epidemics.

Despite the inflow of relief supplies from many parts of the world, taking care of such a vast population is certainly not an easy task. The situation gets grimmer when we realize that providing for the displaced population is not going to end within a week's or month's time, but will require a much longer period until they are resettled, helped to rebuild their lives and made economically independent once again.

Resettlement and reconstruction is not going to be an easy task either. Almost 90,000 houses have been reduced to rubble and over 41,000 have been partially damaged. The first step is to move the displaced population from public buildings such as schools so that the children who were fortunate enough to survive can go back to school and mix and move with other children, thereby minimizing the effects of the terrible trauma they had to endure. That means that we require temporary shelter. Last week the Government made an urgent appeal for 50,000 tents. Meanwhile, the Government has to secure funds to provide permanent housing for the homeless and take steps to construct that housing in more secure locations. Translated into action, that means proper planning and an infusion of a considerable amount of capital as soon as possible.

The tsunami dealt a crippling blow to two vital sectors of our economy, namely, the fisheries industry and tourism in coastal areas. According to report No. 17 of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), over 19,000 fishing vessels were either destroyed or damaged. That represents a massive 66 per cent of our fishing fleet. As many as 7,500 fishermen died, and another 7,086 are still missing and presumed to be dead. In all, over 90,000 persons representing the fisheries sector have been displaced. The cost of repairs to or replacement of boats, repairs to fisheries harbours, ice plants, boat yards and so on is staggering. Even with a swift infusion of capital and the necessary equipment, it will take years for the fisheries industry to recover from the devastation caused by the tsunami. The damage suffered by the tourist sector is also rather high, running into millions of dollars. However, being a dynamic industry, coastal-based tourism will rebound within months, with robust investments. I am happy to say that recovery is already under way.

In addition to those two vital sectors of our economy, the destruction and damage caused to other infrastructure — such as schools, hospitals, roads, rail lines, bridges, power lines, drainage systems and telecommunication systems — is massive. It is estimated that the reconstruction and rehabilitation work will cost approximately $1.5 billion.

At a time when Sri Lankans were feeling that they were alone in their suffering, our spirits were lifted, having experienced the outpouring of sympathy and solidarity from the international community. First to come to our assistance was our neighbour India, another victim of the tsunami, which caused massive damage to its coastal regions and killed over 10,000 persons. Similarly, within days other countries too numerous to mention were also at our doorstep with

relief supplies, rescue and medical personnel and other assistance.

The United Nations went into action on the very day of the tsunami, and the Department of Humanitarian Affairs took immediate steps to assess the situation and arranged for humanitarian relief as quickly as possible. A whole host of friendly countries, numbering well over 50, international lending institutions, big and small private companies, international non-governmental organizations, religious institutions and individuals came forward with generous offers of help as the world had never witnessed before, in a common endeavour to bring succour and solace to victims in the affected countries. We owe all those countries, institutions and persons a deep debt of gratitude for coming to our assistance to meet the unfolding humanitarian crisis.

The pledges made thus far, both in Jakarta and Geneva, are quite generous and reassuring. What is now needed is to transform those pledges into cash and materials as swiftly as possible so that the reconstruction and rehabilitation process can begin in earnest and survivors can once again be self-reliant. Despite this unexpected occurrence, Sri Lanka is confident that this disaster will not come in the way of attaining our medium- and long-term development goals.

Financial assistance alone is not going to help the process of recovery. There is much more that can be done. I need not emphasize the fact that most of the affected countries also have considerable debt-servicing responsibilities. Speaking for Sri Lanka, our debts are in the region $10 billion. In fact, Sri Lanka had set aside $500 million in the current year's budget for debt servicing. With the unexpected havoc created by the tsunami and the material damage we have suffered, we will devote all available resources to the reconstruction effort, provided that donor countries and international lending institutions grant us debt-relief measures. In that regard, we are grateful to countries such as China for forgiving some of our debt. We are also grateful for the decision taken by the 19-member Paris Club to grant a temporary moratorium of up to one year on the repayment of debts.

Apart from aid and debt-relief measures, developed countries could also take other measures to grant us relief to cope up with the economic blow resulting from the natural disaster. One such measure would be to provide market access to the exports of those countries under concessionary terms for a specific period in order to accelerate the healing process.

Despite the extent of the devastation caused by the tragedy, both in human and material terms, I am happy to inform the Assembly that the reconstruction process in Sri Lanka is already in progress, under the personal supervision of President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga. A national operations centre, which was swiftly established by the President, is being spearheaded by three task forces dealing with rescue and relief, rebuilding and logistics, and law and order. Those three task forces are headed by the country's most senior officials and are supported by representatives of the relevant ministries and departments. I am happy to say that, due to the dedicated work of the task force for rebuilding the nation, much headway has already been made. The President unveiled Sri Lanka's action plan on 17 January.

While we focus on the work of reconstruction and the rehabilitation of displaced persons, it is also important for us to request of the friends of Sri Lanka — who in a moment of great need came forward to pledge resources — that their assistance should reach the vital sectors of our economy as quickly as possible. Millions of displaced persons cannot expect to be confined to refugee camps for extended periods, and repairs to damaged infrastructure can also not be delayed for too long. The economies of affected countries need to be resurrected speedily to avoid spawning social and other threats that can follow disasters of this magnitude. Sri Lanka has every reason to believe that it can ride the crest of the wave and reach dry ground quickly, with the support and cooperation of the donor community.

Finally, I would like to conclude by thanking the United Nations and its associated agencies, friendly countries, international financial institutions, national and international non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations, international humanitarian organizations and private companies, as well as individuals, for the moral, material and financial support they have given us at a dark moment in our history. I would also like to express our sincere gratitude to the Secretary-General and other world leaders who rushed to the tsunami-devastated region to assess the situation first-hand and provide assistance. Lastly, Sri Lanka wishes to express its appreciation to

Indonesia for organizing an international conference within days after the disaster. We also thank ASEAN countries for spearheading the draft resolution that is now before the General Assembly.

Mr. Chaimongkul (Thailand): First of all, allow me to express my delegation's sincere appreciation for the timely convening of this resumed session of the General Assembly today. My delegation also wishes to align itself with the statement made earlier by the Permanent Representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic on behalf of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN).

The earthquake and tsunami of 26 December 2004 caused bereavement, pain and destruction to a massive extent. The magnitude of the calamity was indeed both unimaginable and unprecedented. Like other countries in Asia and throughout the world, Thailand has been profoundly moved by the great losses resulting from that incident. Over 5,300 persons lost their lives in Thailand alone, while many thousands more are still missing. In that regard, Thailand shares the pain and suffering of our friends around the world who have been affected by the disaster. We wish to offer our deepest condolences to all the victims and their families. At the same time, we also wish to express our most sincere gratitude to all who extended to us a hand of compassion, solidarity and assistance from the very beginning of this trying period.

Thailand has now moved from the post-disaster relief operations phase to the reconstruction phase. The priority has thus shifted from providing for basic needs such as food and medical supplies to the rehabilitation of livelihoods, infrastructure and the environment, the generation of income and providing psychological counselling to those who have been traumatized by the incident.

An initial assessment of the scale of the damage indicates that over half a billion dollars was lost as a consequence of the tsunami disaster in Thailand. In order to alleviate such losses, $700 million has been approved by the Thai Government to help the Thai people by providing temporary shelter, compensation for household damages, sanitary measures and health-care assistance. The Cabinet has also approved tax breaks for affected individuals and corporate entities. Other fiscal assistance includes debt restructuring, debt moratoria and lower interest rates and fees being offered by Thai commercial banks.

While being a victim of the disaster ourselves, we have never nonetheless attempted to do all we can, within our capacity and resources, to help our friends in the region who are in greater need. We have thus far contributed over $1 million towards the entire relief operation. Moreover, we are committed to staying the course by continuing to play a contributing role in coordinating relief and rehabilitation assistance to affected countries in the region. Our commitment also extends to ensuring that the people living along the shorelines of the Indian Ocean are able to lead safe and more predictable lives in the future.

While looking back at that sad event and trying to come to terms with what has happened, we also need to look ahead to the future and learn from our shortcomings. One major lesson learned from this incident is that prevention is the key. Indeed, we cannot remain complacent. Neither can we neglect our environment. It is also time to take collective action and cultivate a culture of prevention in order to prevent the preventable. To that end, on 28 and 29 January 2005, Thailand will host at Phuket a ministerial-level meeting on regional cooperation on a tsunami early-warning arrangement, to expedite the process of establishing an effective, functioning, real-time early-warning arrangement with a geographical footprint covering the Indian Ocean Rim region. The process of establishing a regional centre for such a task should build upon the experiences of existing bodies in the region.

With that in mind, at the special meeting of ASEAN leaders held in Jakarta on 6 January, Thailand proposed that the ASEAN Disaster Preparedness Centre — the ADPC — be enlarged and utilized as the core of prospective regional early-warning arrangements in the Indian Ocean and South-East Asia. It is our hope that the Phuket meeting will provide the needed political impetus towards that end. Having said that, Thailand fully recognizes the significant amount of financial resources required if we to realize our objective successfully. That is why we will propose in Phuket that a voluntary trust fund for regional early-warning arrangements in the Indian Ocean and South-East Asia be established at the earliest opportunity. As a demonstration of our commitment to that initiative, Thailand has pledged $10 million as seed money.

Having experienced this tragedy, we have learned a very expensive lesson: we need to work more closely together at all levels — nationally, regionally and globally — in order to be better prepared and more secure. Providing basic education to those who do not know, or know little, about the environment — and specifically about the grave consequences of tsunamis — could serve as a good basis for long-term prevention efforts. We have also learned that the international community is capable of coming together in the face of our common suffering. Thus, Thailand strongly believes that we should seize this moment of unity and translate the reservoir of political goodwill into concrete cooperative actions in dealing with the tsunami disaster and other types of natural hazards affecting our common future.

Mr. Latheef (Maldives): At the outset, allow me to express my delegation's sincere appreciation for the leadership shown by the leaders of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) in requesting a resumption of the fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly to consider the devastating effects of the earthquake and the subsequent tsunami that affected many countries in South and South-East Asia and in Africa on 26 December 2004. With more than 170,000 people already dead, the tsunami has caused a disaster of epic proportions. We therefore believe that this meeting of the Assembly is most timely and essential.

Allow me also to express the gratitude of the Government and the people of the Maldives for the central role that the United Nations is playing in providing humanitarian relief to the affected countries. The professionalism and swiftness with which the Organization reacted to this enormous disaster deserve much praise and admiration. The visit of the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, to the worst-affected countries has been a reassuring gesture at this difficult time. His visit to our country, the Maldives, gave our people much comfort at this time of grief and distress. We thank the Secretary-General and his able team, headed by Mr. Jan Egeland, for the leadership they are providing in responding to the situation.

I should also like to join others in expressing our heartfelt and sincere sympathies and condolences to the Governments and the peoples of Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India, Thailand, Malaysia, Myanmar, Somalia and the Seychelles, as well as to other countries that lost citizens in this tragedy. We pray to almighty God to grant them the strength and courage to overcome this most terrible tragedy.

It is my profound pleasure to express, on behalf of the Government and the people of the Maldives, our deep gratitude and appreciation for the most generous and prompt assistance provided by friendly countries, in particular India, Pakistan, Japan, China and Australia, and many others, in the hour of great need and grief.

The tsunami swept the entire length and breadth of the Maldives, leaving behind a path of destruction that is unprecedented in our known history and piles of rubble as remnants of decades of development on a number of islands. The geophysical layout of the country may have saved the Maldives from a death toll higher than we actually suffered: 82 are confirmed dead, and 26 are missing and presumed dead.

Although that in itself is profoundly tragic and shocking to a population of fewer than 300,000 people, what is often overlooked is the fact that the destruction caused to the Maldives is not localized to one area but generalized to the entire nation, severely crippling the entire economy and socio-economic infrastructure. Out of a total of 199 inhabited islands, 53 were severely damaged, 13 of which had to be totally evacuated. One third of our entire population — some 100,000 people — were directly affected: their homes, livelihoods and accessibility to basic services were entirely or partially destroyed or damaged. More than 15,000 people were displaced.

National authorities, non-governmental organizations and members of the public joined hands with United Nations agencies and friendly countries in providing immediate relief and preventing an outbreak of disease as a result of damage to water and sanitation systems, disrupted living conditions, water contamination and inability to access health services.

The tsunami hit the tourism and fishing industries hard, damaging infrastructure and plunging the economy into deep disarray. More than 12 per cent of the fishing fleet is inoperable, ruining the primary livelihood assets of many families and communities. The salination of the freshwater aquifers on a number of islands and the erosion of topsoil have rendered a large part of the limited arable land unusable and unfit for agriculture.

In the tourism sector, out of 87 resorts, 19 were damaged and have been closed down for repairs. However, 54 resorts are in full operation, and we are trying hard to prevent cancellations. Nonetheless, in the wake of the disaster, the hotel occupancy rate has crashed to less than 30 per cent, compared with the full occupancy that is typical for this time of year. But we hope that with 54 resorts in full service, with the outbreak of an epidemic having been prevented and with emergency relief needs having been successfully addressed, travellers will find that visiting the Maldives is in itself a major contribution to the country's recovery efforts.

Only six days before the disaster, the Assembly decided to graduate my country from the list of least developed countries, recognizing its socio-economic development over the past two decades. At the time, the country enjoyed the highest per capita income and human development index in South Asia. Our gross national product was growing at a remarkable rate, and we were also among the few countries that were on track for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. We were about to be taken off the category of least developed countries when the tsunami struck. Within minutes, the livelihoods, hopes and aspirations of many were washed away into the sea and economic infrastructure such as harbours, schools, health centres and powerhouses were crushed to rubble. The tragedy reveals vividly how vulnerable our country is and how delicate our economy remains.

At the ASEAN leaders' meeting on 6 January, Mr. Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, President of the Republic of Maldives, described the situation of the country as follows:

> "Even before the tsunami struck, we had been the most vulnerable to the rising seas. In its aftermath, we have become the most crippled."

According to preliminary assessments, the total economic cost to the country will be well over $1 billion. A report that has just been issued by the Asian Development Bank warns that the absolute poverty level in the Maldives could increase to more than 50 per cent of its population as a result of the tsunami damage. It is imperative that assistance be extended to the Maldives to ensure that we can ward off a humanitarian crisis.

The response of the international community to the Secretary-General's flash appeal has been very positive. We are grateful for the help and support that have been extended to us already and are encouraged by the pledges that have been made by donor nations, agencies and international financial institutions.

The World Bank has been rating our track record among the top five in the efficient utilization of aid. The Government has established a board of trustees to ensure full transparency and accountability in the management of the disaster relief fund, with the full participation of the United Nations Resident Coordinator in the boardroom. The Assembly is aware that we have made very good use of the facilities extended earlier to us as a least developed country. Now, with this disaster, we have to turn to rebuilding our nation and aim at recovery plus. We call upon the international community to extend that assistance to us in a timely manner and to extend all possible assistance to the Maldives.

While we fully appreciate the decision of the Assembly to graduate us, given the circumstances that have befallen our country, we cannot but wonder about the practicality of graduation at this point in time. For graduation to take place, we would first need to restore our socio-economic development at least to pre-tsunami levels. Perhaps the Assembly may consider suspending the implementation of resolution 59/210 with regard to the graduation of the Maldives until conditions have improved. After working so hard to design a smooth transition strategy, we would not want to be graduated without reaping its full benefits, which would be counterproductive and not achieve the intended aims of resolution 46/206 of 1991 and resolution 59/209, which the Assembly adopted only last month.

My Government joins others in echoing the importance of establishing a tsunami early warning system in the Indian Ocean, the Caribbean and other regions of the world. Had such a system existed in the Indian Ocean region, the death and destruction caused by the tsunami would perhaps have been far less. But for the Maldives, where the highest point is barely 1.5 metres above sea level, an early warning system is just not enough. We need ways to provide safety to our people.

In that regard, we are embarking upon a safe-island programme, whereby displaced and exposed communities will be settled in larger and safer islands with better natural protection, enhanced coastal

defences against tidal surges and greater economic prospects. It would make little sense to resettle displaced communities again in islands where there is little environmental security or economic prospects. The programme will usher in a new paradigm of national development through a reduction in unit costs, the enhancement of economies of scale and the reinforcement of environmental resilience. It will also result in a more rational and sustainable development.

We assure the international community that the assistance we receive for relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction will be put to good use to help the country bounce back to pre-tsunami conditions. We intend to make rapid strides towards getting back on course to achieving the Millennium Development Goals by the earliest feasible dates.

Mr. Sen (India): In the early hours of the morning of Sunday, 26 December 2005, disaster struck. A massive earthquake off the west coast of northern Sumatra triggered powerful tsunamis that, in a matter of hours, wreaked untold damage to people living in the coastal areas and islands of India, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Seychelles, Somalia and some other countries.

The death toll in India itself has been estimated at 10,700, with over 5,600 others missing. At a special meeting of leaders convened by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in the aftermath of the natural disaster, Mr. K. Natwar Singh, External Affairs Minister of India, said:

> "Existing vocabularies are inadequate to describe the intensity and magnitude of the horrendous catastrophe that hit a dozen countries of the Indian Ocean. The light went out in so many homes in so many countries in so short a span of time — only in a few minutes."

India did not avail itself of external assistance in dealing with the crisis. However, it deeply appreciated the offers of help that poured in from several countries, the United Nations and non-governmental organizations. We would like to add our tribute to the tributes paid to the United Nations and to the personal commitment and dedication of the Secretary-General. Those spontaneous offers of support and solidarity at a time of crisis were critical in assuring the people of India that they were not alone in dealing with the enormity of the loss they had suffered.

In a sense, the foundations of the United Nations have been strengthened not just by what it did in coordinating relief efforts, but above all by the colossal international solidarity shown by ordinary people throughout the world and by their contributions, and reflected in the actions of their Governments.

India's experience of handling natural disasters has enabled it to develop well-defined mechanisms for disaster management at all levels. The lessons we learned from the Orissa cyclone of 2000, the Gujarat earthquake of 2001 and other disasters have helped effect a paradigm shift in our approach to disaster management. That has proceeded from the conviction that development cannot be sustainable unless disaster mitigation is built into the development process at all levels. As a result, we were able to respond to the disaster promptly through a massive effort launched by a well-oiled machinery, experienced and trained personnel, and with the resources required to successfully deal with the unexpected disaster within our existing capacity.

It also became clear to us that, while our situation was serious, there were other affected countries where the need for immediate relief through the international community was even greater. Indian air force planes and Indian naval ships have formed an almost continuous bridge of relief assistance to Sri Lanka and the Maldives in solidarity and friendship. Many hundred sorties have been flown to deliver relief supplies and for search and rescue. The planes and ships have also brought field hospitals, doctors and paramedical staff. Naval ships have completed surveys of Galle and Colombo harbours and are helping to restore telecommunications and communications in Trincomalee. Indian naval ships have similarly delivered relief supplies and set up field hospitals in Aceh in Indonesia.

In India, the worst impact of the tsunamis was on the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. With 1,300 island territories, with their fragile ecosystems, India has a special empathy with the needs, situation and vulnerabilities of small island developing States. At the recently concluded International Meeting of Small Island Developing States in Mauritius, India therefore outlined, and discussed bilaterally with many of the States, an expanded programme of cooperation to address those vulnerabilities. The Mauritius Declaration and the strategy document emphasized the need for that and, in that context, the need to set up

early-warning systems. It will be recalled that, as early as 1994, the Barbados Programme of Action had noted the importance of early-warning systems and, therefore, of technology — telecommunication links and satellite facilities.

In India, cyclones used to wreak havoc in the coastal regions of Andhra Pradesh. However, early-warning systems using remote sensing and satellite technology have now stopped such happenings. Furthermore, in response to the tsunami disaster, the Government has announced an allocation of several billion rupees for putting in place tsunami early-warning systems. With our capacities in the field of sensors and satellites, we are prepared to cooperate with the international community, particularly the Indian Ocean and South-East Asian region, for establishing such a system.

India was part of the tsunami core group, initially consisting of the United States, Japan, Australia and India, established to facilitate a coordinated effort to deal with the disaster. We were invited because we had the military assets to help in a concrete manner with the relief efforts. Yesterday, in the context of the core group's operations in Banda Aceh, Indonesia, Secretary-General Kofi Annan, stated,

> "I must say that the core group which the United States put together, made up of the United States, Australia, India, Japan, Canada and Singapore, had made a real difference. Without their heavy lifting and clearing up for us to move in, it would have been a logistical nightmare. The roads were destroyed, airports were not easily usable, but they have been extremely helpful in doing that, and making sure with helicopters we could reach those who were difficult to reach. So the Government had allowed us to go in."

In the immediate aftermath of the disaster, the effort was on search, evacuation and relief. This has now shifted to the establishment of communications networks, the prevention of outbreaks of epidemics, and relief and rescue operations in the far-flung Nicobar group of islands off India. Supplies to inaccessible areas have been air-dropped. For both the Andaman and Nicobar groups of islands, an integrated relief command has been constituted for effective action. There is a calamity relief fund for immediate expenditure. There is an existing mechanism of eight battalions of paramilitary forces equipped as specialist search and rescue teams, which has been extremely useful in dealing with the aftermath of the tsunami.

Within the first week after the disaster itself, the Government of India incurred an expenditure of $250 million for the relief and rehabilitation effort within India and a substantial amount in neighbouring countries. It has also given due importance to alleviating the psychological impact of the disaster through trauma counselling, the early reopening of schools and access to television sets. Fortunately, resource mobilization in India itself has been successful, with contributions from the Indian public — from ordinary people — amounting to at least $120 million, of which $100 million had gone to the Prime Minister's National Relief Fund alone by 10 January.

The focus now is on the reconstruction and rehabilitation phase. It is axiomatic that those who suffered the most were the poor, particularly those whose dependence on the sea made the crisis so much harder to bear. The Government of India, in cooperating with the United Nations and the international community, is committed to rehabilitating those affected by the crisis at the earliest possible date. As John Ruskin so movingly said, "this green tide that eddies by my threshold is full of floating corpses".

The response is one of sustained political will and international solidarity to carry out reconstruction, restore the livelihoods of the living and protect them, to the extent possible, from future disasters. In this effort, the role of the United Nations, including agencies like the United Nations Development Programme, and multilateral institutions, including the World Bank, in implementing quick, creative and concrete programmes is critical. In the words of the Indian Sanskrit saying from many thousand years ago, "*Vasudhaiva Kutambhakam*" — "the world is one family".

Mr. Rastam (Malaysia): My delegation welcomes the resumption of the fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly today. My delegation, representing both a country affected by the tsunami and a country member of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), fully associates itself with the statement made by the Lao People's Democratic Republic on behalf of ASEAN.

Malaysia believes that the resumption of the session marks another crucial step in the follow-up

efforts undertaken by the international community, led by the United Nations, to address the medium- and long-term humanitarian, rehabilitation and reconstruction needs of the affected countries. We hope that the General Assembly will reach consensus on the draft resolution introduced by the sponsors.

My delegation would like to reiterate its sincere condolences and deep sympathy to the Governments and the peoples of all the affected countries for the tragic loss of life and the devastating socio-economic, psychological and environmental impact of the unprecedented tsunami disaster. We also extend similar sentiments to the Governments and the peoples of countries whose citizens perished or suffered injury or loss as a result of the disaster. We would also like to take this opportunity to express sincere appreciation and gratitude to all who have sent messages of sympathy and condolence to Malaysia and offered assistance at this traumatic time.

For Malaysia, the fact that the tsunami had affected us came as a national shock. The immediate priority of the Government has been to ensure the restoration of normalcy to the affected areas. Appropriate assistance has been provided to the victims. In Malaysia, 68 people died and about 8,000 people were displaced. Six Malaysians died in neighbouring countries, and a few remain missing. The financial burden of dealing with the effects of this disaster is quite heavy for Malaysia. But the Government can cope with the situation. Malaysia feels that most of the other affected countries deserve more immediate attention, and we are doing our part to assist them, too.

Malaysia has dispatched humanitarian, medical and search-and-rescue teams, with supplies, heavy equipment and helicopters, to Aceh. A team of Malaysian volunteer doctors and medical staff was among the first to reach Banda Aceh immediately after the disaster struck. The Royal Malaysian Air Force has utilized C-130 and CN-235 aircraft to ferry medicine, medical supplies and communications equipment. The Royal Malaysia Navy deployed a ship carrying 500 tons of humanitarian aid, including food, baby food, drinking water, medicine and medical supplies, as well as heavy equipment, including two bulldozers, three excavators and six three-ton trucks to Aceh to assist the people in the affected areas there.

Malaysian airports have also been used as staging points for the delivery of goods and other materials to the affected countries, especially Indonesia. Malaysia has also set up an Asian tsunami disaster fund to enable the Malaysian people and the corporate sector to contribute money for the relief of tsunami victims in other countries. So far, more than 12 million ringgit in cash, including a 5 million ringgit contribution from the Government of Malaysia, has already been extended to Indonesia, Maldives and Sri Lanka. As of 14 January, public contributions for domestic tsunami victims have exceeded 53 million ringgit.

It is not entirely possible to prevent natural disasters from occurring. However, a lot can be done to mitigate their devastating effects. In this regard, it is necessary to set up early warning systems that focus not only on tsunamis, but also on other equally destructive natural disasters. The scale of the recent tragedy might not have been as enormous had the appropriate systems been in place. For now, Malaysia and many other countries do not have such alert systems. We are ready to extend our fullest cooperation and take part in any initiative aimed at providing the necessary capabilities in this matter.

Malaysia also looks forward to learning from and working closely with other countries and international bodies that have expertise in early warning systems. Malaysia is fully aware of the high costs involved in setting up such infrastructure; it may in fact be prohibitive to many developing countries. We believe that only the United Nations can pool the resources, expertise and capacity to undertake such a massive endeavour in the region. As such, Malaysia is of the view that the United Nations must be fully involved if any such initiative is to succeed. Malaysia also hopes that the developed countries will show equal commitment in cooperating to establish an effective regional natural disaster monitoring system.

At the national level, the Government of Malaysia has approved an initial allocation of 19 million ringgit to establish an early warning system for the country. The operational cost is estimated at 3.5 million ringgit per year. However, the Government has yet to decide on the type of system to be used. We are now gathering information from countries that have more experience in dealing with catastrophes caused by tsunamis.

In addition to the establishment of early warning systems, Malaysia is convinced that there are certainly many ways of alleviating the hardships of the tsunami-affected countries and assisting them in their gigantic tasks of reconstruction. One concrete proposal relates to the cancellation or review of their international debts. Malaysia hopes that countries in a position to do so will seriously consider taking that far-reaching step of noble statesmanship in the name of humanitarianism.

Mr. Swe (Myanmar): At the outset, my delegation would like to thank you, Mr. President, for the timely convening of this meeting of the General Assembly in the aftermath of the earthquake and tsunami disaster of 26 December, which caused massive devastation and a human tragedy of vast proportions in the coastal States of the Indian Ocean rim.

My delegation fully associates itself with the statement made by the Permanent Representative of Lao People's Democratic Republic, who spoke on behalf of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN).

I also wish to join preceding speakers in expressing our heartfelt sympathy to the victims, their families and the Governments of the countries affected by the tsunami disaster. My delegation also wishes to express its appreciation to the international community for its prompt response and outpouring of support. The unprecedented scale of the tragedy has unified the countries of the world as never before. Countries across the globe shared the grief and demonstrated solidarity and support for the affected countries in various ways. That response has vividly demonstrated the increasingly globalized nature of the world. The active role of the United Nations and the untiring efforts of its agencies, such as the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, UNICEF and the United Nations Development Programme, in coordinating and assisting relief measures also deserve our high commendation.

Located in the geographical proximity of the epicentre, Myanmar did not entirely escape the effect of the tsunami. However, because of its unique topographical features, Myanmar was fortunate to emerge with minimal damage in comparison to other, seriously affected countries in our region. The waves generated by the earthquake hit coastal areas in Taninthayi, Yangon, Bago, Ayeyawady and Rakhine states. The earthquake even affected areas as far as Shan state, causing several buildings to collapse. The earthquake and the tsunami resulted in the loss of lives and property. The toll stands at 59 dead, 3 missing and 43 injured. Nearly 600 houses along the coast were destroyed, leaving more than 3,000 persons homeless.

In the wake of the disaster, the authorities of Myanmar lost no time in responding. A team headed by the Minister for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement, which includes officials from the Ministry of Health and medical specialists, was dispatched to the worst hit areas to provide necessary assistance. Relief goods, including food, clothing and medical supplies, were delivered expeditiously. Simultaneously, help and relief supplies were provided to affected communities in other states and divisions. Priority was accorded to relief efforts. Special attention was given to the provision of safe drinking water and medicine to prevent the outbreak of epidemics. Authorities at various administrative levels have been working together with organizations such as the Red Cross, the Auxiliary Fire Brigade, the Union Solidarity and Development Organization and the Maternal and Child Welfare Association to assist in relief efforts. Various United Nations agencies in Myanmar are also providing valuable support. Due to those timely relief measures and in view of the minimal impact, we have been able to mitigate and contain the effects of the disaster.

Myanmar is grateful to those friendly countries and international organizations that have contributed to disaster relief funds in our country. In that regard, we would like to place on record our appreciation to the People's Republic of China, Japan and others for their generous contributions.

Myanmar stands in full solidarity with other affected countries. Therefore, while my country was affected by the disaster, we feel that the more seriously affected countries deserve the priority attention and assistance of the international community. In responding to that tragic disaster, we should join hands not only to provide emergency relief but also to extend sustained assistance for medium- and long-term programmes for the rehabilitation and the reconstruction of the devastated areas. In that regard, I wish to stress the importance of the leadership role and the request of the country concerned in establishing

partnerships and in implementing national programmes for humanitarian assistance.

More important, we must also work together to plan for the future in order to avoid the loss of lives and property if such a natural disaster strikes again. Recent disasters have reminded us that nature is unpredictable and that we need to be better prepared. Monitoring, assessment and response capabilities must be enhanced. Our painful experience of this catastrophe has highlighted the urgent need to accelerate our collective efforts to develop a regional early warning system in the region that would effectively reduce our vulnerability to tsunamis and other natural disasters.

The earthquake and the tsunami have brought us all together. The challenge before us is indeed daunting, but it is a challenge that, by working together, we can successfully meet. My delegation stands ready to work with other members of ASEAN and our partners to that end.

Mr. Hoscheit (Luxembourg) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to associate myself with the thanks addressed to you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting of the General Assembly.

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The acceding countries Bulgaria and Romania; the candidate countries Turkey and Croatia; the countries of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia and Montenegro align themselves with this statement.

Let me first convey the European Union's deepest condolences to the Governments and peoples of the countries that were affected directly or indirectly by the consequences of the earthquake and the tsunamis that hit the Indian Ocean and South-East Asian region, as well as parts of East Africa, on 26 December.

Citizens of 50 countries died in the tsunami disaster. The countries of the European Union were not spared. Thousands of our citizens died or are missing alongside tens of thousands from the countries of the region. We wish also to express our thanks and gratitude to the authorities and peoples of the affected countries, who provided assistance to the citizens of our countries in the stricken areas and facilitated their repatriation. Millions of citizens from throughout Europe expressed their sympathy and solidarity on Wednesday, 5 January, by observing three minutes of silence in memory of the many victims.

I also wish to extend our thanks to the United Nations family, and in particular to Under-Secretary-General Jan Egeland and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, and to pay tribute to the work they have undertaken under the guidance of our Secretary-General by reacting so promptly to that unprecedented disaster and by meeting the emergency needs of the countries and peoples concerned.

In the wake of the devastating catastrophe, the international community's reaction — both by Governments and by civil society, including non-governmental organizations and private persons — has been swift and generous. As early as 5 January, the United Nations launched the flash appeal for the Indian Ocean earthquake-tsunami at a special summit of the heads of State and Government of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) in Jakarta. Five days later, at the donors conference held in Geneva on 11 January, pledges of assistance were made by representatives of Member States. As of today, close to 75 per cent of the appeal's funding requirements have been met. Those generous contributions and pledges will be remembered as among the fastest responses ever to an emergency appeal.

It is now our common responsibility to continue to live up to our commitments and to deliver on our pledges. To date, the total commitments of the European Union and its member States stand at over €1.5, or approximately $2 billion, in public assistance. That exceptional effort will cover immediate humanitarian needs arising in the disaster-affected areas and support longer-term reconstruction and development work. In that connection, it is important to ensure that the resources released in the context of recent events will indeed complement development commitments already made and that other emergencies will not be forgotten.

The European Union will continue to support the United Nations in the face of that enormous challenge in both the short and the long terms. In that context, I reaffirm the European Union's full and unwavering support for the essential role played by the United Nations in coordinating the ongoing efforts on the ground. Close and sustained cooperation will be maintained between the European Union, the United

Nations funds and programmes, and the coordinating services of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, as well as with Special Coordinator Margareta Wahlstrom.

The European Union also wishes to contribute to the strengthening of the United Nations role in humanitarian response. In that respect, various options can be considered and deserve to be studied with attention. Within the European Union, several initiatives — including the creation of an international humanitarian force — have been proposed by States members. Those will be the subjects of intense work in the weeks to come within the European Union's bodies and in the framework of the United Nations, as laid out in the draft resolution before us.

Luxembourg's Minister for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Action, Mr. Jean-Louis Schiltz, and the European Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid, Mr. Louis Michel, travelled to the affected region on 1 January. Luxembourg's Prime Minister, Mr. Jean-Claude Juncker, in his capacity as acting President of the European Council of Ministers, and the President of the European Commission, Mr. José Manuel Barroso, joined the leaders of the ASEAN countries in the immediate aftermath of the disaster to assure them of the solidarity of the States members and citizens of the European Union. At the donors conference in Geneva, the representative of the European Union made it clear that the Union's solidarity will not falter and will continue beyond the initial emergency phase.

We must indeed look to the future. Ministers of the 25 member States, meeting on 7 January in Brussels, reaffirmed the European Union's long-term commitment to assisting the affected countries and communities through successive phases, from humanitarian assistance to reconstruction and rehabilitation. Let there be no doubt about our long-term commitment to helping the affected countries to overcome the challenges they face.

A comprehensive financial aid package of the European Union is being prepared in close cooperation between member States and the European Commission. Indeed, on 31 January, the European Union ministers will meet again to consider all medium- and long-term measures envisaged by the Union and its member States with a view to establishing an operational action plan.

Let me also reiterate that the European Union places particular importance on capacity-building efforts in the field of prevention, preparedness and mitigation of natural disasters. It is crucial that the necessary technological and financial means be made available to prevent, to the extent possible, future natural disasters of this magnitude and their devastating consequences. The European Union welcomes the initiative taken by the Government of Germany to host a third conference on early warning systems in the course of this year.

Following upon the commitment it made in Jakarta, the European Union will actively support efforts to establish an early warning system in the Indian Ocean and South-East Asian region. The World Conference on Disaster Reduction, which starts today in Kobe, Japan, will allow for a first exchange of views on how to proceed towards that goal.

We all continue to witness the tragic consequences of the brutal unleashing of the forces of nature. Over the past weeks, the international community has reacted collectively with an admirable display of solidarity. The Assembly may rest assured that the European Union and its member States stand ready to sustain their efforts.

Mr. Sow (Guinea) (*spoke in French*): I have the honour and the great privilege to speak on behalf of the Group of African States in my capacity as its Chairman for the month of January.

At the outset, I should like to express to you, Mr. President, our full gratitude and appreciation for the swift convening of the General Assembly in plenary meeting to consider agenda item 39, entitled "Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance". I should also like to thank the Permanent Representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, who, on behalf of the Association of South-East Asian Nations, was the initiator of this timely meeting.

During the previous debate on agenda item 39 at the fifty-ninth session, held last November, we considered the reports of the Secretary-General on international cooperation on humanitarian assistance in the field of natural disasters (A/59/374) and on strengthening the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations (A/59/93). The principles of disaster prevention and

management set out in those reports are even more relevant to us following the horrific consequences of the tsunami that swept through South-East Asia and several African countries.

The tsunami of 26 December 2004 in the Indian Ocean caused worldwide grief and a global tragedy by striking eight Asian countries with incredible violence, sending unprecedented shockwaves around the globe. Destroying everything in its path, the raging sea caused — according to statistics that unfortunately are still not final — nearly 170,000 deaths, with hundreds of thousands of missing persons, including nearly 10,000 tourists from Europe, the United States and many other countries. The deadly swath of the destructive tsunami even affected the east coast of the African continent, where there were hundreds of dead and missing and several coastal villages devastated.

On behalf of the African countries, I would like once again to express our heartfelt condolences and sympathies to the Governments, peoples and families of the victims of the disaster.

Africa welcomed the appropriate and swift response of the international community and of Governments, private groups and the general public in dealing with this disaster and in helping the people, countries and families affected. At the initiative of its leaders, the international community immediately mobilized its energies and resources to concretely demonstrate its sympathy and its solidarity with the victims.

In that context, the African Group, in considering the item on our agenda, cannot fail to emphasize the necessity and urgency of seeking solutions and comprehensive and lasting responses to the challenges posed by vulnerability to natural disasters. We believe it is now crucial to agree on measures that can strengthen emergency relief, recovery, reconstruction and prevention and to vigorously address all threats related to natural disasters — not only seismic tsunami waves, but also storms, cyclones, hurricanes, drought, deforestation and the locusts that devastate certain regions of the world, including Africa, with increasing frequency. Special attention must also be accorded to global warming, which is leading to an inexorable rise in sea level, threatening nearly 100 million people living at sea level.

To ensure the success of our work, the Assembly must firmly rely on the relevant recommendations already endorsed in the past and on those resulting from the International Meeting for the 10-Year Review of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, held in Mauritius. We also place great hope in the World Conference on Disaster Reduction, which began its work today in Kobe, Japan. Undoubtedly, the Kobe Conference will serve as a framework for assessing the implementation of the Yokohama Strategy and for updating the guiding framework on disaster prevention for the twenty-first century, while defining activities necessary to carry out the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

Right now, it is highly desirable that we immediately find ways and means to enable us to swiftly implement the proposal made in Mauritius by the Secretary-General recommending the swift implementation of a 'global early-warning system that would cover all regions of the world. For, at this time, as Kofi Annan has so rightly pointed out, we need to think in global terms and plan measures commensurate with the risks.

Mindful of the colossal needs facing the region affected by the tsunami, we appeal to the international community and to all donors to maintain and strengthen their beneficial support throughout the recovery and reconstruction phase. We hope that the great solidarity and generosity expressed at this time of difficult trial will be extended to other political or humanitarian crises.

Finally, the African Group is determined to make a positive contribution to the thinking process now under way with a view to achieving consensus on the draft resolution submitted for our consideration and finding a collective, consistent and lasting solution to the challenge of natural disasters.

Mr. Suazo (Honduras) (*spoke in Spanish*): With all due respect, I cannot begin my statement without requesting that the Assembly observe a minute of silence on behalf of the hundreds of thousands of people who lost their lives in this natural disaster.

The members of the General Assembly observed a minute of silence.

Mr. Suazo (Honduras) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I wish to express, on behalf of the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, our sorrow and

condolences to the countries affected by this natural disaster.

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States on agenda item 39, "Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance". We thank the Secretary-General for his recent and current reports and for submitting document A/59/93, on strengthening the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations.

As last year drew to a close, the Latin American and Caribbean countries could not have imagined, at a time of deep religious feeling and of hope for the new year, that 2004 would end with a disaster of such tremendous proportions.

Our region has had its share of natural disasters, which have become more numerous recently and which have proved to be more destructive than war and civil strife. But they have never come close to the devastation caused by the tsunami disaster, which caused hundreds of thousands of deaths in a few hours, destroyed homes, crops and businesses, and set back economic development in the affected States by many decades. Those States are also facing the threat of pandemic diseases as a result of the flooding.

The international community responded speedily. However, given the magnitude of the disaster, Governments were physically unable to respond adequately. As an example of the scope of the tragedy, often, when aeroplanes arrived with humanitarian assistance, the land itself had completely disappeared.

Natural disasters are unavoidable and rarely foreseeable, and that is why they wreak such terrible destruction. But the devastation they cause can be prevented through the use of early warning mechanisms, and, if we take strategic long-term measures to effectively eradicate poverty, safeguard the environment and promote living conditions in urban areas, their effects can be mitigated. We believe that international assistance to such areas must continue and increase.

The importance of the Barbados Programme of Action — a milestone in terms of sustainable development, in particular for small island developing States — means that it deserves particular consideration on our part. Our region welcomes the Mauritius Declaration reaffirming the validity of the Programme of Action as a road map that provides the basic framework for the sustainable development of small island States.

The Group welcomes the increasing coordination between the United Nations system, international agencies and other regional institutions, which jointly responded immediately to that humanitarian emergency.

The Group of Latin American and Caribbean States also shares the concern expressed in recent publications as to the decrease in emergency relief funds once the interest of the public has waned and the media has shifted its attention to other disasters. Pledges are withdrawn, relief organizations move on and reconstruction projects are abandoned. We heard it said recently that the Millennium Development Goals are equal for all; but the ways and means available to achieve them are not.

The Group wishes to express its continued solidarity and support for the affected peoples and Governments of the Indian Ocean and pledges to assist them in the years to come as the rebuild their lives.

Finally, the Group of Latin American and Caribbean countries supports the draft resolution contained in document A/59/L.58, entitled "Strengthening emergency relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and prevention in the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster".

Mr. Kazykhanov (Kazakhstan): I have the honour to address the General Assembly today on behalf of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the People's Republic of China, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Russian Federation, the Republic of Tajikistan and the Republic of Uzbekistan.

We commend the States members of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) for their initiative to convene this plenary meeting of the fifty-ninth session devoted to the recent tragic event that literally shook the world.

Our countries were profoundly saddened to learn of the massive loss of life and destruction caused by the powerful earthquake and devastating tsunami that struck the western Pacific and Indian Ocean last December. Our thoughts and prayers remain with the

people in the region and with those in many other countries who have lost their loved ones.

The Governments of the States members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization have extended their sincere and heartfelt condolences to the Governments of the tsunami-stricken countries.

What happened on 26 December 2004 was an unprecedented disaster of global dimensions. The tsunami which struck the Indian Ocean nations was the worst natural disaster in history. For millions of people in the 12 countries affected, spanning two continents, and for tens of thousands of visitors from 40 nations around the world, it has caused a deep psychological trauma that will take a long time to heal.

For the United Nations itself, this has been the largest natural disaster to which the Organization has had to respond in the 60 years of its existence. The Organization has launched one of the biggest relief operations ever to assist the tsunami-stricken societies of South and South-East Asia. Ever since the disaster struck, the Organization has been on the front lines with the countries of the region, which have been very actively engaged in the process.

We commend the tireless efforts of the Secretary-General in mobilizing international assistance to the directly affected countries. Indeed, this unprecedented global catastrophe requires an unprecedented global response. We believe that the United Nations will continue to play a leading role in this process, working with the entire international community.

The goodwill and concern expressed around the world have been enormous. Governments have made pledges and contributions and expeditiously moved their assets, aircraft, equipment and goods into the region, providing much-needed relief to its suffering peoples.

As for the States members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, they have contributed, and continue to contribute, to the common cause of providing assistance to the countries affected by the disaster, including humanitarian and financial aid.

Driven by compassion, by human feeling, State institutions, public organizations and ordinary people from all countries have been making their own contributions to the funds established to provide assistance to the victims of this natural disaster. At the same time, we share the view that, considering the sheer magnitude of the crisis, no agency or country is capable of dealing with it alone, and that we need to coordinate and pool our efforts to ensure that our intervention has the maximum impact. To that end, a great deal of money and effort will be required, for an extended period.

This global catastrophe has triggered debates among scientists and politicians on how to put in place a more effective early warning system to deal with this kind of situation. Some 2,000 international experts and officials from about 150 countries are currently in Kobe, Japan, to participate in the World Conference on Disaster Reduction, whose timing turned out to be so very sad indeed.

We expect that, under such overwhelming circumstances, the conference will be able to identify those functions that must be enhanced in order to set up regional mechanisms for surveillance, early warning, assessment and prevention of natural disasters.

In this regard, the States members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization believe that the draft resolution on establishing regional mechanisms on surveillance, prevention and assessment of severe natural disasters, submitted by the People's Republic of China for consideration and adoption at the Kobe Conference, could truly promote international and regional cooperation on disaster reduction. We urge Member States to provide valuable support for that proposal.

We support the draft resolution entitled "Strengthening emergency relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and prevention in the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster", submitted by ASEAN, and expect that the General Assembly will adopt that important document by consensus.

In conclusion, I should like to assure the Assembly that the States members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization will continue to do their best to support efforts to provide emergency relief assistance for disaster-stricken countries in the western Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.

United Nations A/59/PV.78

General Assembly

Fifty-ninth session

Official Records

78th plenary meeting
Tuesday, 18 January 2005, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Ping ..... (Gabon)

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 39 (*continued*)

Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance

Mr. Hashi (Somalia): At the outset, allow me to express to you, Mr. President, our deepest appreciation for reconvening the fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly to address the tsunami disaster that has devastated a number of countries in Asia and Africa. I also take this opportunity to express once again our profound condolences to the Governments and the peoples of Indonesia, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, India, Thailand, Kenya, Tanzania and the Seychelles. The devastation was of great magnitude and resulted in unprecedented loss of life and destruction. We also offer our deepest condolences to all the other countries that lost citizens in the wake of this disaster.

The response of the international community was prompt and generous. The United Nations flash appeal and pledges by Members of the United Nations, together with the involvement of United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations, will surely mitigate the effects of the tsunami. In that regard, I wish to thank the Secretary-General for launching the United Nations flash appeal and for other initiatives that he undertook. The commitment by the international community to long-term rehabilitation and reconstruction is appropriate and most welcome. I also take this opportunity to commend the United Nations relief agencies for their tireless efforts in coordinating relief assistance in Somalia and other affected countries.

Somalia is one of the African countries seriously affected by the tsunami. On the morning of 26 December, fishing communities along Somalia's vast coastline — the longest in Africa — were preparing for the beginning of their day. Almost eight hours after the tsunami hit Asia, they had no idea that their lives would be changed forever. The tsunami pounded almost 700 kilometres of the Somali coastline, from the northern tip of Hafun to the southern coast of Mogadishu and beyond.

A delegation from the Government of Somalia recently visited the affected areas to assess the extent of the damage caused by the tsunami. The current death toll is estimated at 500, and over 100,000 people are estimated to have been displaced and left homeless. It is worth noting that, with proper early-warning systems in place in the Indian Ocean, eight hours would have been sufficient time to evacuate and spare the lives of countless victims. In this regard, we support the establishment of regional early-warning systems in the Indian Ocean and beyond, as envisaged in the draft resolution before the Assembly.

The effects of the tsunami will no doubt leave a lasting mark on Somalia for some time to come. The affected areas — especially in the rural town of Hafun, where over 95 per cent of homes were destroyed — are currently in a state of complete destruction and

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dissolution. Homes, roads, hospitals and schools no longer exist. Local fishing communities have been decimated to the point where almost all the boats — 12,600 of them — and nets are gone, and those that remain are severely damaged and pose a safety risk. The displaced are being sheltered under plastic sheeting provided by UNICEF or in huts made from branches, leaving many of those affected without proper sanitation and with very little clean water, medicine or much-needed food.

As a result of the tsunami, the geographical outline of Somalia's north-eastern coast has been altered, and residents have no choice but to rebuild their homes inland so as to avoid being flooded when sea levels rise. The makeshift camps are extremely overcrowded, and outbreaks of malaria, cholera, typhoid, respiratory infections and other diseases may therefore result. The World Food Programme (WFP), UNICEF, the World Health Organization (WHO) and other relief agencies and non-governmental organizations are doing their best under extremely difficult circumstances. But there is a greater need for a comprehensive assessment of the physical and psychological damage suffered by the victims of the tsunami in Somalia.

The relief agencies in the affected areas of Somalia are also in need of immediate assistance themselves. Facing poor road conditions, poor communication networks and the daunting challenge of feeding and sheltering thousands, these relief agencies are in dire need of more efficient means of reaching isolated areas and villages in the north-eastern coastal towns of Somalia that are still partly submerged.

It is also worth noting that, prior to the tsunami, the affected region was already suffering from a large-scale humanitarian crisis, with a four-year drought, periodic flooding and unusually cold temperatures. Furthermore, the tsunami coincided with an important milestone in the history of Somalia, namely, the recent formation of an all-inclusive Government of National Unity for Somalia. However, the already dire humanitarian situation, coupled with the tsunami, poses considerable new challenges for the incipient Government of Somalia. This underlines the urgent need to support the new Government.

I call on all nations to come to Somalia's aid to help us to strengthen our political will, capacity and humanitarian coordination in order to best alleviate the impact of this crisis. We appeal to those developed countries that are in a position to make a difference. This disaster requires a continued commitment for the long-term rehabilitation and reconstruction of the social and economic fabric that has been shredded in all the countries affected by the tsunami. We also call on those generous nations that have pledged support and assistance to expedite the much-needed resources required to sustain and rebuild the livelihoods of those in despair.

I would like to thank the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and its leadership, as well as WFP, WHO, UNICEF, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, the United Nations Development Programme, the International Committee of the Red Cross and all the other relief agencies involved, for their hard work and perseverance in our time of need.

Finally, I am sure that expressions of human solidarity at this critical time will be extended to those who need help.

Mr. Mekdad (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like, first of all, to thank you, Mr. President, for having convened this meeting to consider the tragic effects of the natural disaster that struck South Asia and South-East Asia. We would also like to thank the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the current Chairman of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, for having taken the initiative to call for this meeting on what is known worldwide as the tsunami disaster.

Hundred of thousands of innocent victims were struck by this natural disaster in a few minutes, perhaps seconds, in Indonesia, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Thailand, India, Malaysia, as well as in countries thousands of miles away such as Kenya and brotherly Somalia, where hundreds of people were wiped out by the tsunami. The world has witnessed many devastating natural disasters, but it could be said that this one, which has taken hold of the conscience of the entire world, has opened our eyes to the importance of acting together, immediately, to mitigate the consequences of such a catastrophe, which has killed some 172,000 people, including children, women and the elderly. It has displaced millions of citizens, separating them from their families, places of work, homes and lands. Within just a few seconds they found themselves

without family — without children, spouses mothers and fathers.

The swift reaction of the States Members of our Organization demonstrates the solidarity and attentiveness of the international community in reacting to this disaster, which has affected mankind as a whole.

As a sign of this solidarity with sisterly and friendly peoples, the President of the Syrian Arab Republic sent telegrams of condolences and sympathy on behalf of the Syrian Arab people to the leaders of peoples affected by the earthquake and the tsunami.

Syria expresses its sorrow and its solidarity with the Governments and the peoples of the affected countries. We have sent material assistance, such as medicines, water and blankets to the victims. Working with international organizations, Syria's Red Crescent Society is trying to get as much assistance to the victims as quickly as possible.

The United Nations is coordinating the emergency relief assistance to mitigate the effects of the tsunami disaster, and the Syrian Arab Republic supports that initiative. We pay special tribute to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs for providing direct humanitarian assistance to victims and for launching an appeal for additional emergency humanitarian assistance. The 6 January meeting convened in Jakarta at the initiative of the Indonesian Government was also important for coordinating international relief efforts and made possible an international plan for providing required assistance and for mitigating the consequences of the tragedy.

The representative of Somalia spoke of the magnitude and the consequences of the tragedy; it changed the very topography of the Somali coastline. We express our appreciation to and solidarity with the international community, Governments and relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction organizations. They have demonstrated solidarity and cooperation by trying to cope with the disaster. We call upon them to ensure that the affected countries and peoples are assisted so that they can overcome the devastating physical and psychological effects of the tragedy. We urge donor nations and relevant international organizations and institutions to fulfil their pledges of financial and technical assistance.

We support the proposal that the Secretary-General appoint a special representative to coordinate international reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts with a view to mitigating the effects of the disaster in the medium and long terms. The Secretary-General should have access to all the necessary resources to ensure that the international community can rapidly respond to disasters and provide humanitarian relief. Preparatory work and initiatives should be carried out to that end. Preventive arrangements under the aegis of the United Nations should be established and public education on disaster warning and prevention should be conducted, especially in local communities.

It does not appear that tsunamis are limited to certain regions of the world. Other regions as well can be struck by catastrophes and tragedies similar to the one that struck South and South East Asia. We believe it is urgent to implement the decision of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations to establish a regional mechanism for disaster prevention and preparation in order to mitigate the effects of disasters. It is also necessary to enhance national and regional capacities and to share necessary science and technology to establish a regional early warning system, thereby enabling countries and the international community to react in solidarity and partnership when disasters take place. Efforts to coordinate humanitarian assistance after natural disasters are also necessary. Solidarity throughout the world demonstrates that such a course of action is necessary to relieve the suffering caused by such disasters.

It is an honour to add my country's name to the list of sponsors of the draft resolution, which the General Assembly should adopt unanimously.

Mr. Chulkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The Russian delegation supports the statement by the representative of Kazakhstan on behalf of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. I would like to add a few additional comments.

First, on behalf of our delegation, I once again express our deepest condolences to those countries affected by the tsunami in the Indian Ocean. We grieve together with the peoples of those States, and we assure them of our ongoing support.

In the light of the devastating consequences of the natural disaster, on the instructions of the President of the Russian Federation, our country began to send

humanitarian assistance to the affected countries on the very next day following the catastrophe. On 27 December, aircraft of the Ministry of Emergency Situations delivered to Sri Lanka search and rescue teams with special equipment and rescue dogs. Humanitarian deliveries to the region followed, including urgently needed supplies, water purification stations, mobile electric generators, tents, bedding, disinfectants, drinking water and food. In response to the request made by affected States, we began an airlift of Russian equipment and medical staff on 9 January for deployment on the island of Sumatra, Indonesia, and a field hospital and health and anti-epidemic teams were sent to Thailand and Sri Lanka. In addition, Russia has allocated more than 20,000 tons of grain for the people of the aforementioned three countries. As of 14 January, the aircraft of the Russian Ministry of Emergency Situations and Ministry of Defence have already conducted 20 flights to the region, delivering humanitarian supplies totalling more than 500 tons.

Russia is giving assistance to the affected countries not only on a bilateral basis but also within the framework of multilateral efforts. The Russian representative took part as an observer in the early January meeting in Jakarta on disaster relief in the Indian Ocean. A Russian delegation is now taking part in the work of the World Conference for Disaster Reduction, which began today in Kobe, Japan, during which there are plans to discuss, among other things, the lessons to be drawn from this tragedy.

In a statement at the Geneva donors conference on 11 January, the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation announced that the Government has made a decision to allocate $22 million to mitigate the consequences of the earthquake and the tsunami; of that sum, $12 million will go to the World Food Programme, $3 million to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, $3.5 million to UNICEF and $3.5 million to the World Health Organization. With respect to the airlift by the Russian Ministry of Civil Defence, Emergencies and Natural Disasters of humanitarian assistance, medical supplies and food, the Russian contribution to alleviating the consequences of the disaster has amounted to date to over $33 million.

For us, as for the international community, it is important properly to assess the tragedy that has occurred and to draw appropriate conclusions from it. We feel that the following must clearly be taken into account.

There is a growing need in the current circumstances for the capacity to predict emergency situations, to prepare for them in advance, and to react swiftly to them. Of particular timeliness in this instance is the effort to strengthen the machinery to plan for such situations in the future.

We must strengthen national early warning systems so that the damage caused by natural disasters can be evaluated and their consequences mitigated. That should lead to the establishment of a global network for early warning in major emergency situations. In that connection, we welcome the initiative of States members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations to establish such a regional system and, as a sponsor, we actively support the draft resolution before the Assembly.

We believe that the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction must continue to seek to integrate emergency response machinery into development programmes, which is of particular importance to the developing countries in the context of achieving the Millennium Development Goals. In all of this work, a principal mobilizing and coordinating role must, of course, continue to be played by the United Nations, which, as experience has shown, can ensure that the humanitarian needs of afflicted populations are met in the most effective manner. In that regard, it is important for the Organization to recall the significance of transparency and accountability in allocating assistance provided by donors.

Mr. Gillerman (Israel): Israel shares the international community's deep sorrow over the thousands of lives lost to the ravages of nature and its profound sense of concern for those victims still suffering.

The United Nations was itself born out of calamity. Its birth heralded the fact that cooperation and international brotherhood could bring rays of light to even the darkest of times. We face an analogous situation today. So many innocent people have been lost to us and intense distress has been visited on those who have survived, but the cooperation being exhibited by the international community is a manifestation of the fundamental moral unity of mankind and a reaffirmation of the United Nations founding principles. That cooperation transcends nationality,

race, ethnicity and religion, for this is a tragedy that is felt around the world, and providing for those who have been most savagely affected by it is the responsibility of all.

Israel is proud to be playing a part in the recovery effort. We feel that the moral responsibility to ease the suffering of fellow human beings extends beyond borders, geography and politics. To that end, Israel has been honoured to put some of our capabilities and know-how about dealing with disasters, gained through bitter experience, at the disposal of those nations struck by the tsunami. We are pleased to have contributed financially to the relief efforts of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), attesting to our continued support for the general mandate and humanitarian work of OCHA. In addition, a plane from Israel's El Al airline recently flew to Sri Lanka and Indonesia, carrying 85 tons of emergency aid materials donated by Israeli organizations and companies.

Emergency kitchens are providing hot meals for some 4,000 people per day. An Israeli mobile medical clinic has been set up and a separate medical delegation specializing in trauma has already begun work on the ground in Sri Lanka. Israel's Magen David Adom, as part of its ongoing increasing cooperation with the International Committee of the Red Cross, participated in the relief efforts both independently and in concert with other Federation partners. Israel also sent a police forensic unit specializing in casualty identification, as well as psychological teams very experienced in post-trauma situations.

Israeli aid to Indonesia has included 16 tons of baby food, 30 tons of rice, flour, water, sugar and grain, and 20 tons of medicine. In addition, non-governmental Israeli organizations have donated two water purification systems and 12 communication networks. As the Director-General of Israel's Foreign Ministry recently said, Indonesia is

> "the largest Muslim country in the world, with which we do not have diplomatic relations. I feel that they received our aid as it was given, from heart to heart, Jews helping Muslims in times of distress."

Indeed, although the world has just witnessed the depths of cruelty that nature is capable of unleashing, we are now seeing the extent to which international brotherhood and universal human morality can fuse us all in times of real need. Let us hope that the sense of international solidarity brought on by the relief efforts is not temporary or isolated, and that our empathy for those suffering does not end at the shores of the countries affected by this disaster. Rather, we should continue to unite to help all those around the world who are in distress. Each and every life is sacred. As the Talmud teaches us, "He who saves one human life saves the world entire."

Mr. Adel (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like to express our gratitude for the urgent consideration of this agenda item on the strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations in the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster.

I endorse the statement made by the representative of Guinea on behalf of the African Group.

In solidarity and deepest sympathy, we address our sincere condolences to the Governments and families of the victims of the tsunamis that struck a number of friendly countries in South and South-East Asia and East Africa, including our sister country of Somalia. We also express our solidarity as human beings in the face of that tragic natural disaster.

The countries that have been stricken by this catastrophe have suffered human and material losses that require the coordination of assistance from the international community, the United Nations and its specialized relief agencies. They must not only provide emergency assistance, but also continue to provide a wide range of medium- and long-term aid so as to ensure the success of national and regional reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts, normalize the lives of the survivors in those countries and enable them to overcome the effects of the catastrophe.

We would like to express our gratitude to those donor countries which have provided debt and debt servicing relief to the affected countries. That will undoubtedly help the States affected by the disaster to accelerate the implementation of their reconstruction and rehabilitation programmes.

In this context, Egypt also supports the draft resolution submitted for consideration by the General Assembly today. We also invite member States to support the draft and to work actively towards its implementation.

The Egyptian delegation has on many occasions, in particular in November 2004, during our general debate on this agenda item, stated the importance of coordination by the United Nations of humanitarian assistance, and it underlined also the need for prioritization and an integrated approach in dealing with natural disasters at their various stages.

I should like in that connection to commend the active and effective role played by the Secretary-General and by the relevant bodies of the United Nations system, especially the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, in dealing with the crisis and in coordinating relief efforts. We hope that the assistance being provided by States and international financial institutions, for which we express our gratitude, will continue and be doubled so that humanitarian assistance can be adequately funded, with a view not only to alleviating the devastating effects of the increasing number of natural and environmental disasters on poor nations that have taken place in recent years, but also to acting in accordance with the principle of solidarity and international integration and in keeping with the letter and the spirit of the Charter of the United Nations.

For its part, Egypt has decided to send urgent humanitarian assistance to the most affected countries by using its aircraft to provide food, medical assistance, medicines, tents and blankets to the affected countries, in coordination with these countries and in accordance with their needs and priorities. The Egyptian Government wishes thereby to express its solidarity with those friendly countries at this time of crisis and to help in international efforts to cope with this disaster, which has caused such a tremendous loss of life and has so seriously damaged the region's towns and infrastructure.

Finally, we would like to express Egypt's full solidarity with the affected States and peoples as well our readiness fully to cooperate with the international community and the United Nations in working to help cope with this disaster and to avoid any repetition of this tragedy in future.

Mrs. Patterson (United States of America): We recently witnessed one of the worst displays of natural destruction in history. More than 150,000 lives were lost in the 26 December earthquake and tsunami in the Indian Ocean. Families have been struck by devastating grief, losing loved ones, homes and livelihoods. The American people offer their profound sympathy to the peoples and nations touched by this tragedy, and we recognize and are grateful to the leadership of the United Nations in coordinating assistance to victims of the disaster.

As President Bush said, in the midst of this tragedy we have also witnessed one of the greatest displays of compassion. People and nations are working to ease the suffering brought on by this terrible disaster. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reports that more than $3 billion has been pledged by donors so far, one of the largest humanitarian relief operations in history.

The United States Government has made an initial commitment of $350 million for disaster relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction for victims of the tsunami. America's armed forces and emergency response specialists from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) have been sent to the region to support relief efforts and are distributing aid 24 hours a day. In addition to United States Government support, tsunami victims have also received aid from American citizens, non-governmental organizations and businesses.

Despite these valiant international efforts, there should be no illusion as to how long it will take to rebuild affected communities. The United States is committed to the long-term reconstruction of the affected countries. The primary responsibility for rebuilding lies with the disaster-struck countries themselves, and reconstruction plans will reflect their priorities. The international community has a chance to work alongside those affected. It will be vitally important for donors to continue to work in close, coordinated fashion with host Governments, each other and the agencies conducting assessments so that resources are used effectively.

It is also imperative that reconstruction efforts include the establishment of a warning system to reduce the likelihood that widespread death and destruction from such a disaster will occur again. The United States strongly supports a global warning system, conducted under the aegis of the Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS). We encourage those nations interested in a global tsunami warning system to work with the GEOSS consortium of 54 nations to develop the technical and data-

handling aspects of such a system. GEOSS is particularly important because it is an already existing framework for international coordination and deals with data-sharing and availability issues. The United States encourages all nations to operate within the GEOSS framework, building on its existing, promising, multilateral format.

Any development of a regional warning system should be part of an integrated global system. An internationally coordinated tsunami warning system already exists in the Pacific Ocean — the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission Tsunami Warning System. The implementation of a global warning system should be carried out by expanding the existing UNESCO tsunami warning system in the Pacific Ocean into the Indian Ocean and anywhere coastal communities are threatened by tsunamis. Within this global design, the United States believes that the development of an Indian Ocean part of the global warning system should be a top near-term priority.

A detection and monitoring system for tsunamis is necessary but not sufficient to reduce a tsunami disaster. The technical systems for detection and monitoring must be complemented by an assessment of existing warning capabilities, training of local officials, installation of national and local warning communications systems, and a process of public education that will enable citizens in susceptible areas to respond appropriately to warnings. National and local officials in threatened nations must be prepared to respond to warnings within minutes and to communicate warnings to local populations via sirens, mass media, specialized radio systems and other notification technologies. Response plans must be developed nationally and locally well in advance of a hazardous event, and the public must be well educated about response plans. National and local authorities must take the lead in educating their populations about response plans.

Finally, monitoring and warning systems should be designed with the intent of serving to alert at-risk populations about all major hazards in their area, and not exclusively about tsunamis and earthquakes. This "all-hazards" philosophy should permeate thinking on the development of a global warning system.

The United States is committed to working with international partners to develop and improve such a system. At the third Earth Observation Summit in Brussels, to be held on 16 February 2005, the United States will present its preliminary plan for a global tsunami detection and warning system. That plan will be consistent with the points I have made here, namely, that the United States supports the development of a global, all-hazards warning system, conducted under the aegis of GEOSS and building on the existing UNESCO Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission Tsunami Warning System in the Pacific.

In the best tradition of the United Nations, the international community has stood together with the affected countries to respond to the devastation of the South Asian earthquake and tsunami of 26 December. We commend the level of international cooperation in that humanitarian response and particularly note the dedication of United Nations staff members all across the globe who have worked tirelessly on that complex operation. We must continue to work together to develop a global warning system to prevent such massive destruction and loss of life from happening again, whether from an earthquake, tsunami or other form of natural disaster.

Mr. Bennouna (Morocco) (*spoke in French*): First, allow me to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this important meeting to discuss the consequences of the earthquake and tsunami that occurred in the Indian Ocean.

On behalf of the Government and the people of Morocco, I express our profound sympathy and sincere condolences to the leaders, the families of the victims and the peoples of the region affected by that natural disaster.

Morocco, which at the beginning of last year suffered a deadly earthquake affecting its northern provinces, shares the grief and suffering of the peoples that were victims of that tragedy, whose scale and unexpectedness struck the entire world. The international community, including civil society, the private sector and the general public, reacted spontaneously and with great generosity to aid the affected populations.

We pay tribute to the role and the initiatives of our Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, subsequent to the tragedy, in particular his appointment of a

coordinator of all emergency assistance and relief operations in the devastated areas.

For its part, Morocco has done everything within its means to assist the disaster victims. We immediately sent emergency relief assistance, consisting principally of medicines and other urgently needed items. Moroccan non-governmental organizations actively provided support to victims in the brotherly countries of Indonesia, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Thailand and the Maldives.

The generosity and the solidarity demonstrated attest to the existence of a worldwide awareness that we all belong to a single planet, threatened by common phenomena and catastrophes that could strike any time anywhere.

The consequences of the earthquake and tsunami are disastrous for the populations and the economies of the countries affected. The rehabilitation and reconstruction of the affected region will take time and require massive investment in the short term, as well as in the medium and long terms.

The collected funds and the pledged assistance, however considerable they may seem, will not suffice for the complete reconstruction of the damaged areas. Sustained support from the international community is vital in that respect. International and regional financial institutions must play an essential role in the reconstruction of the socio-economic fabric and the basic infrastructure, in order to restore hope to the affected peoples.

The tragedy that has struck the Indian Ocean touches us all. It demonstrates once again our vulnerability to natural phenomena and reminds us that we must incorporate disaster prevention and disaster risk reduction into our development policies. The tragedy underlines the need to strengthen the global capability to respond to disasters — as the representative of the United States has just noted — and the importance of implementing early warning mechanisms and of strengthening international cooperation to that end.

The World Conference on Disaster Reduction, which began today in Kobe, Japan, provides an opportunity for all Member States to identify measures to guard against the risk of natural disasters. When I say "guard against", I do not mean, of course, that we can prevent natural disasters but that we can at least reduce the risks to human life and property. The Conference is timely, coming just after the earthquake and tsunami in Asia, at a time when international public opinion and world leaders are focused on that part of the world and on the tragedy that has just taken place. The international community should not fail to take advantage of this unique opportunity to take concrete measures to reduce the disaster risks, to establish early warning and response mechanisms and to strengthen the capacity of poor countries to prevent disasters.

Experience in dealing with the consequences of natural disasters of recent decades has demonstrated that poverty exacerbates the risk of devastation caused by natural disasters. Earthquakes, cyclones, floods and droughts cause more victims and damage in poor areas, where people do not have the means or the capability to foresee and prevent situations of that type or to respond appropriately when a disaster occurs.

Natural disasters should prompt us all to redouble our efforts to foster peace, mutual assistance and international solidarity and to act collectively with a view to reducing the risk of disasters of all types and origins and, when they occur, to be prepared in order to limit the loss of human life and material damage.

Finally, we would like to emphasize that Morocco, which has become a sponsor of the draft resolution introduced by the representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic on behalf of the countries affected by the tsunami and others, hopes that the text, once adopted, will be implemented as speedily as possible with a view to ensuring that the international community can continue to mobilize and to cope with the gravity of the situation.

Mr. Oshima (Japan) (*spoke in French*): Allow me at the outset, Sir, to express our pleasure at seeing you preside over this meeting, which is obviously of great importance to the entire international community.

(*spoke in English*)

First of all, I would like to extend my deepest sympathies and condolences to the victims of the 26 December tsunami disaster in the Indian Ocean, as well as to their families. I wish to reiterate Japan's solidarity with the countries affected by that unprecedented tragedy and express our sincere respect for the tremendous relief efforts their Governments and

people have deployed to cope with that extremely dire situation.

I wish to take this opportunity to express our appreciation to the Secretary-General for his leadership in guiding the United Nations efforts; to all United Nations agencies and their aid workers who are providing assistance, day in and day out, under extremely trying circumstances; and especially to Under-Secretary-General Jan Egeland and his team from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, who are doing an outstanding job coordinating humanitarian assistance and helping to raise funds from the international community. The concerted international response, both public and private, has been truly remarkable.

For its part, my country, Japan — itself highly prone to natural disasters — has been providing assistance in every way it can by mobilizing its personnel, assets, knowledge and expertise, and by providing financial support.

With respect to the deployment of personnel, we have sent several civilian disaster-relief teams to the affected region to provide emergency relief and medical and other assistance to the devastated areas in Indonesia, Thailand, Sri Lanka and the Maldives. Japan has also mobilized assets of its self-defence forces for maritime search-and-rescue operations, air transportation, epidemic prevention and medical treatment.

To date, Japan has pledged $500 million as its immediate grant contribution and in response to the United Nations flash appeal, which covers support over the next six months. Japan will complete disbursement this week of half of its grant contribution, $250 million, which will be allocated directly to United Nations agencies, funds and programmes and other international organizations that are engaged in relief and rehabilitation. The $250 million will comprise about 25 per cent of the flash appeal launched by the Secretary-General in Jakarta 12 days ago.

Moreover, Japan, as a fellow Asian country, will provide the remaining half of the $500 million pledged to the most severely affected Asian countries — Indonesia, Sri Lanka and the Maldives, among others — through bilateral grant aid, and that bilateral assistance will also be disbursed immediately. I join the Secretary-General in appealing to other countries that have pledged assistance to implement their pledges as quickly as possible.

The word "tsunami" is a term that derives from an old Japanese word meaning "harbour waves" or "port waves". It suddenly crashes down on a harbour or port — usually populated areas — after going undetected on the high seas. To prevent or mitigate the damage and suffering that tsunamis can cause after a massive earthquake in the ocean, an early warning system is critically important. After the painful lesson of the tsunami disaster caused by the huge earthquake that struck Chile in 1960 — in which crashing waves as high as 12 metres swept down on that country and, hours later, impacted the beaches of other countries of the Pacific rim, including parts of Japan — the International Coordination Group for the Tsunami Warning System in the Pacific was established under the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and a round-the-clock monitoring and warning system was created, with a key monitoring centre in Hawaii, in the middle of the Pacific Ocean.

Today, 18 January, as we speak, the United Nations World Conference on Disaster Reduction has just opened in the city of Kobe, in Hyogo Prefecture, Japan, where, it will be remembered, a severe earthquake struck the city and killed over 6,000 people 10 years ago. One of the lessons from the recent tsunami tragedy is the need for an early warning system for the region. Japan, as the host country, has proposed a special session at the Kobe Conference that would be dedicated to the discussion of the establishment of a tsunami early warning system in the Indian Ocean and South-East Asian region. We hope that a concrete plan of action will be agreed upon at that meeting so that the concerned countries in the region, with the support of the international community, will begin their work on a reliable mechanism of early warning.

The International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR), UNESCO and other relevant agencies, working together with the donor community, should play a key role in such efforts, building on the experience and expertise gained in the Pacific Ocean early warning system. In that effort, Japan can and will contribute significantly by providing the necessary knowledge and expertise that it has acquired through its own experience over the centuries with many

earthquakes and tsunamis. In addition to a financial contribution of $4 million to ISDR for promoting international cooperation in that area, in close collaboration with UNESCO, Japan stands ready to cooperate with the United Nations and other interested donor countries, as well as coastal countries directly concerned.

It is a stark fact that nearly 75 per cent of the world's population live in areas that have experienced at least one serious natural disaster event of one kind or another — earthquake, typhoon, cyclone, hurricane, flood, drought and so on — over the past 20 years. Billions of people in over 100 countries are known to suffer periodically from the effects of natural calamities. Every day, on average, natural disasters claim the lives of close to 200 people around the world. In 2003 alone, 700 natural hazards resulted in 75,000 deaths and economic losses of more than $65 billion. Thus, unmitigated natural disasters not only take high human tolls, but also destroy economic and social infrastructure and set back development, particularly in developing countries, which in effect constitutes a dire threat to human security. They have a particularly severe impact on the poor — either a country or a population within a country — by exposing and augmenting vulnerabilities. They adversely affect, in no insignificant way, our fight against poverty, hunger and disease.

Despite that stark reality, the issues relating to natural disasters are, in my view, unfortunately underestimated by nations and by the international community, including the United Nations system. Not enough attention has been paid to the importance of disaster reduction and not enough political will has been mobilized, particularly in addressing the impact of natural disasters on development.

If awareness of the need for an early warning system is one lesson learned from the current tsunami disaster in the Indian Ocean, another lesson that should be learned is the need to enhance the political will to cope with natural disasters by incorporating, for example, disaster prevention and mitigation into national development planning. Natural hazards cannot be prevented, but damage caused by hazards can be prevented and avoided by proper preparedness, response and mitigation efforts.

That point is strongly emphasized in Japan's Initiative for Disaster Reduction through Official Development Assistance, which was announced by Prime Minister Koizumi on the occasion of the World Conference on Disaster Reduction now taking place. The amount of Japan's official development assistance directed to projects and programmes for disaster reduction has been at the highest levels among donors, with some $300 million in fiscal year 2003. Based on the Initiative, Japan will continue to actively support the efforts of developing countries to build a disaster-resilient society through a comprehensive menu of assistance, such as institution-building, human resource development and infrastructure development.

As the Secretary-General has emphasized, support from the international community to help the disaster-stricken countries in the Indian Ocean should not stop at immediate relief, however important that is. Given the magnitude of the disaster, assistance for rehabilitation and reconstruction will need to be provided over the long term. The international community must sustain strong political will to that end. Japan stands firm in extending the maximum possible assistance to rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts, as well as to immediate relief.

I sincerely hope that the outpouring of compassion and the unity of purpose shown around the world will help strengthen international cooperation and resolve to address the many problems faced by the world community, including disaster prevention and reduction, climate change and a development strategy that incorporates disaster reduction, all with a view to opening up a new vista for the future.

Mr. Kumalo (South Africa): I thank you very much, Sir, for helping us to organize this meeting today.

We wish to join in reiterating our Government's condolences to the people and Governments of the countries of South-East Asia and the east coast of Africa who were victims of the unprecedented devastation caused by the undersea earthquake. The tsunami hit India, Indonesia, Kenya, Maldives, Madagascar, Seychelles, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Tanzania and Thailand, and claimed thousands of lives. For example, a South African Inter-Ministerial Committee delegation visited Somalia and discovered that more than 300 people had died and that 54,000 were displaced by the tsunami. South Africa itself lost a number of its citizens and we are still searching for many that remain missing. We can therefore understand

why the world has responded so urgently and warmly to the victims of that unprecedented disaster.

We note with appreciation the response of the many countries that have given assistance to the victims of the tsunami. The commitments made by the international community in Jakarta and Geneva are unprecedented. My delegation is particularly pleased that the United Nations system, especially the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), responded promptly and in a manner that has done our Organization proud. However, it is the donations by people of all ages and from all walks of life, including from every corner of the world, that are indeed heart-warming. Those people have taught us that solidarity remains possible in addressing global disasters.

Both Secretary-General Kofi Annan and Mr. Jan Egeland, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, have underscored the importance of ensuring that the international community remains committed and involved in the recovery and also in the reconstruction phase of the crisis. It is a hopeful sign that many world leaders have already acknowledged that their support for the tsunami victims is long-term and will in no way detract from commitments made to other development and humanitarian crises.

My delegation supports the call for the appointment of a special representative of the Secretary-General to coordinate humanitarian support for the United Nations. We also believe that the creation of an international disaster fund under the management of the United Nations is urgent. That would enable the United Nations to respond to the immediate needs of those affected by disasters while more long-term assistance is being mobilized.

Furthermore, South Africa, like many other countries, is supportive of the establishment of a tsunami early warning system in the Indian Ocean region. The establishment of such an early warning system would link well with Africa's plan to address humanitarian disasters in a regional manner following the adoption by the African Union of the Africa Regional Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction.

In the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation adopted at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, we committed ourselves to an integrated, multi-hazard and inclusive approach, especially in the strengthening of early warning systems and the need to enhance institutional capacities to address vulnerability, risk assessment and disaster management.

From the lessons we have learned in the aftermath of the tsunami, including the devastation caused by hurricane Ivan in Grenada and Haiti, it is evident that the developing countries do not have the domestic resources to recover on their own. The efforts of developing countries to obtain the necessary capacity and means to strengthen their own responses to crises continue to be frustrated by declining levels of official development assistance and lack of foreign direct investment. Furthermore, many pledges made to provide assistance for reconstruction to developing countries that have suffered from natural disasters remain unfulfilled.

The report of the Millennium Project, led by Professor Jeffrey Sachs, confirms that assisting developing countries to achieve the international development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration, will not be possible if the status quo remains. The report calls for a major scaling-up of investments in development, as well as for stronger and more effective international action on debt relief, trade and science and technology.

It is indeed ironic that the tsunami disaster happened at a time when we were in the midst of preparing ourselves for an important summit to be held in September 2005, at which some of us feared security issues were going to overwhelm the global agenda. The lesson from the tragic events in South-East Asia and the east coast of Africa, however, is that underdevelopment remains a permanent threat.

At the recent international meeting in Mauritius on the 10-year review of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, the Secretary-General reiterated the interconnectedness of development and security, and highlighted developmental challenges such as extreme poverty, climate change and the spread of infectious diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS.

My delegation believes that, as we continue to prepare for the summit in September 2005, the important element throughout will be how we begin to develop global partnerships among developed and developing countries and involving private and civil society that can address both security and development. The challenge for us will be how we can

act collectively, based on unwavering political commitment at all levels, to address the needs of the developed and the underdeveloped to create a better life for all. For that reason, we fully endorse the draft resolution before us today.

Mr. Tesch (Australia): Let me begin by reiterating the Australian Government's deepest condolences to all those affected by the earthquake and tsunamis that struck the Indian Ocean region on 26 December.

I would also like to express our appreciation to the States members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) for their initiative in proposing this draft resolution on the tsunami disaster and response. It is important that we recognize and discuss this important issue in this Hall, and we are very pleased to be sponsoring the draft resolution.

Australia commends and strongly supports the leadership role that affected countries have played in the response to this disaster. Excellent regional cooperation swung into action immediately after the tsunami, and the international community's response deserves high praise indeed, but we would equally like to pay tribute to the way the countries of the region, ASEAN and others have come together in their response to this disaster.

We would also commend the role the United Nations is playing in the coordination of international assistance to tsunami-affected countries. Agencies such as UNICEF and the World Food Programme (WFP) are also playing an important role in the delivery of emergency relief. We are strongly supportive of the coordination role of the United Nations in the emergency response and would particularly like to recognize the contribution that Mr. Jan Egeland, Emergency Relief Coordinator and head of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, has made.

Australia's assistance to victims of the tsunami disaster has been immediate, generous, closely coordinated with the national capacities in the tsunami-affected communities, and targeted to priority needs. It is a clear reflection of our commitment to the Asia region.

The Australian Government has provided 60 million Australian dollars for emergency relief across the region, funding direct support by Australians sent to the affected areas, as well as the activities of United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations and international organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

In addition to the immediate emergency assistance we have provided and continue to provide, the Australian Government has announced a 1 billion Australian dollar, five-year partnership for reconstruction and development between Australia and Indonesia. That programme will assist Indonesia to recover from the devastating impact of the tsunami and is the biggest single aid package in Australia's history. Importantly, it recognizes that emergency relief is just the tip of the iceberg of the true impact of this disaster. The recovery process and the rehabilitation and reconstruction work will take many years and cost many billions of dollars.

Another component of our response is the assistance being provided directly by the Australian Defence Forces and Australian Federal Police, which have fielded relief teams to assist with medical and victim identification services.

I think it is also important here to acknowledge the response from the public and private sectors around the world, including in Australia. As is happening the world over, the people of Australia are expressing their sympathy and their support for those affected by the tsunami disaster. To date, the Australian public has contributed some 190 million Australian dollars to the relief and rebuilding effort. A national day of mourning was observed across Australia on 16 January, and, here in New York, a relief concert will be held next week, on 26 January — coincidentally, the national day of India, one of the affected countries, and also of Australia — to help raise funds for the victims of this tragedy.

In addition to responding to the relief, reconstruction and rehabilitation needs, a key element of the draft resolution that we will be adopting today is about better systems for warning of such disasters, for preparing for their impact and for mitigating the damage that they do. We stand ready to help the region take forward efforts to prepare for, mitigate against and respond to future disasters, and we look forward to continuing our cooperation with other delegations.

Mr. Zhang Yishan (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): At the outset, allow me to express once again, on behalf of the Chinese Government and people, our

deepest condolences to the families of the victims and the most sincere sympathy to those who lost loved ones in the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster on 26 December last.

Let me first thank you, Mr. President, for having convened today's meeting, which is being held at the initiative of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries, which I should like to thank as well. Let me also express my gratitude to the delegation of Kazakhstan for the statement it made on behalf of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization — a statement that we endorse.

The Indian Ocean tsunami is a disaster for all of humankind. The international community has responded positively and strongly with an unprecedented global humanitarian emergency relief effort. The United Nations, for its part, has played an important leadership and coordination role. Secretary-General Kofi Annan and the heads of the United Nations agencies concerned paid timely visits to the disaster-stricken areas to carry out inspections and provide guidance in disaster-relief efforts. The Secretary-General also attended the special ASEAN leaders' meeting on the aftermath of the earthquake and tsunami and, on behalf of the United Nations, made urgent appeals to the international community for post-disaster reconstruction.

Today we are considering a draft resolution entitled "Strengthening emergency relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and prevention in the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster", submitted by Laos at today's resumed meeting of the fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly. This meeting has provided Member States with the opportunity to pool their wisdom in order to help the affected countries and reflects the human spirit of togetherness in times of difficulties and disasters. The Chinese delegation supports the convening of this meeting and hopes that the draft resolution will be adopted by consensus.

Since China is a developing country that is also prone to natural disasters, we have a profound understanding of the damage and the suffering endured by the affected people. As a friendly neighbour of the afflicted countries, we have been filled with anxiety and sympathy for their plight. In the wake of the catastrophe, the Chinese Government immediately launched its emergency mechanism and started a foreign disaster relief operation, the largest ever in China's history. The Chinese Government pledged $2.6 million in assistance the very next day. Later, in view of further developments, the Chinese Government committed to contributing another $6.5 million and is giving positive consideration to relieving the hardest hit countries of their governmental debt that had fallen due or to reducing their payments.

Individual donations by the general public in China have exceeded $12.1 million, including those from the elderly and children. One man of over 80 visited the local Red Cross office twice to contribute from his very modest pension. A six-year-old pupil led by his mother donated more than 1,000 yuan in coins he had saved over the past few years. Some young people personally called on the ambassadors of affected countries in China to make their contributions and express their sympathies. In the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, more than 500 million Hong Kong dollars have been raised. The Chinese Government has also dispatched medical and rescue teams to the affected areas at very short notice. The Macao Special Administrative Region has also sent a rescue team to the disaster-hit area.

At the special ASEAN leaders' meeting on the aftermath of the earthquake and tsunami, Premier Wen Jiabao announced that the Chinese Government would respond to the United Nations appeal with a donation of $20 million for multilateral relief and reconstruction efforts within the United Nations framework. At the United Nations ministerial meeting on humanitarian assistance to tsunami-affected communities held in Geneva, the Chinese Government confirmed that it would make its contribution, via the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, to the United Nations agencies — including the United Nations Development Programme, the World Health Organization, the World Food Programme, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Population Fund and the International Organization for Migration — for their emergency relief, post-disaster rehabilitation and reconstruction operations. China will consult with the Office on a detailed programme to distribute the aid and, in light of the needs of the affected countries, give priority to sanitation, drinking water, education and infrastructure restoration. We also hope that our contribution can be added to United Nations assistance in establishing an

early warning and response mechanism for regional disasters.

As a Chinese saying goes, "when one place is in need, assistance comes from all quarters". The Indian Ocean tsunami disaster has demonstrated yet again that closer international and regional cooperation is an effective means for coping with natural disasters. The Chinese Government would like to join all Governments in a concerted effort to help the affected countries mitigate against disasters, rebuild their homes and restore their life to normality.

Mr. Hachani (Tunisia) (*spoke in French*): At this time of international bereavement, Tunisia reiterates its condolences to the affected countries of South Asia and Africa for their human losses resulting from the tsunami.

We further wish to express our esteem for the generous pledges of contributions made in response to the United Nations emergency appeal for the stricken countries. May that expression of worldwide solidarity and generosity help to limit the impact of the enormous human suffering caused by the disaster and to address the considerable needs for emergency assistance and long-term recovery aid.

In making its modest contribution as a symbol of compassion and solidarity with the victims, the Tunisian authorities, at the behest of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, have equipped four planes to carry humanitarian assistance in the form of food, blankets, tents and medicine.

My delegation commends the Secretary-General for his decision to send a special envoy for emergency assistance and reconstruction to the countries affected by the tsunami of 26 December.

Above and beyond the tsunami — a borderless phenomenon that brutally struck eight Asian countries and five African — 2004 was a year of destruction for many countries due to the effects of climate change, rising sea levels and hurricanes of exceptional violence that struck several regions around the world. There are many lessons to be drawn from those many catastrophes. The first undoubtedly concerns the need to establish an early warning system at the regional and international levels.

In that connection, my delegation joins in the Secretary-General's appeal for the establishment of a worldwide early warning system for all natural disasters and the decisive implementation of measures in response to climate change. Indeed, the 26 December tragedy has highlighted once again the need to create a worldwide warning and prevention system covering not only tsunamis, but also all other destructive phenomena, such as the effects of rising sea levels caused by global warming, tidal waves and hurricanes. The system should cover the areas most vulnerable to such phenomena, including the Mediterranean.

The mourning triggered by the tsunami in South-East Asia and Africa is global. The great movement of solidarity that it has generated is unprecedented. We express the hope that this moment of heightened solidarity in the history of our planet will further bolster our commitment to our Organization and to its ability to meet present and future humanitarian challenges throughout the world.

Tunisia has become a sponsor of the draft resolution before the Assembly and hopes that it will help us to continue effectively to address the problems of the countries stricken by the recent tragedy.

Mr. Almansoor (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): As I speak, the world has been plunged into mourning by the tsunami, a natural disaster that has killed tens of thousands of people, unleashed terrible suffering and destruction, and bereft hundreds of thousands of people of their livelihood.

I should like, on behalf of the Government and the people of Bahrain and on my own behalf, to express our heartfelt condolences and deep sympathy to the families of the victims and the peoples and the Governments of the friendly nations affected by this humanitarian disaster — a catastrophe unprecedented in recent history. We would also like to express our thanks and appreciation to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations for its initiative to convene this important meeting. I would also like to thank the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the Non-Aligned Movement for their support for the holding of this meeting.

The world was shocked by the undersea earthquake that struck the Indian Ocean region. It was horrified by the total destruction of cities and the disappearance of villages and the deaths of thousands of innocent children and young and elderly people. The disaster affected all alike — large and small, strong and weak, rich and poor. They were all at one stroke

displaced, dispersed and left with no families. People lost children, husbands, wives, mothers and fathers. Homes, churches, mosques and temples were all destroyed, without distinction.

One mitigating factor in this great tragedy is, of course, the solidarity, sympathy, immediate response and support expressed by the countries of the world to all those affected by the disaster, without regard to geographic, political, religious or ethnic distinction. We hope that that solidarity will continue among all of humanity. This is a time when we truly need such solidarity and compassion — a time when the lack of security and stability has caused many problems and much conflict among nations. This one earthquake has brought together all countries, large and small, and demonstrates in a positive manner what we can do in the face of the unexpected effects of nature's anger.

In calling for emergency assistance to the affected States, Secretary-General Kofi Annan has stated that the international community would need more than $900 million over the next six months in order to cover the cost of emergency humanitarian assistance to the approximately 5 million people who have been affected by the catastrophe. Given the nature and scale of the disaster, solidarity on the part of the international community is an absolute necessity if those countries that have been affected are to overcome the consequences of the catastrophe.

Dealing with the effects of this grave disaster requires immediate assistance to the inhabitants of the affected areas, who will need to take steps to prevent such catastrophic consequences in the future. The international community will need to make a collective effort to establish an integrated early warning system in order to predict and to protect against such natural disasters, in terms of both preparing for and mitigating their destructive effects.

States and international, non-governmental and civil society organizations have all shown great solidarity in helping those affected everywhere, despite incalculable difficulties. I would like to express sincere gratitude and appreciation to all those countries and organizations that so rapidly provided emergency assistance to the affected States and their peoples.

We are deeply concerned about the possibility of the spread of communicable lethal diseases, such as cholera and malaria, among the survivors, and we believe that every necessary precaution should be taken to protect them. We also believe it extremely important to ensure the immediate provision of safe drinking water and emergency health services. The World Health Organization can play an extremely important role in these very difficult circumstances.

In addition to emergency relief, many survivors need psychological rehabilitation, medicines and medical treatment. They also need to regain their means of livelihood and to overcome the effects of the catastrophe. That will require the support and solidarity of the entire international community, which provided assistance in the immediate aftermath of the disaster.

The Kingdom of Bahrain was shocked by this humanitarian disaster and immediately responded to the call of duty, providing emergency assistance totalling $2 million to the affected States, in addition to sending the emergency material and humanitarian assistance that the people of Bahrain contributed through the humanitarian organizations that are active in the field. Bahrain has always shown solidarity with friendly States and peoples through good times and bad. We have always provided assistance at difficult times, and our people and Kingdom, under the leadership of His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa, will always do so.

Mr. Løvald (Norway): We have been witnesses to the worst earthquake and tsunami disaster in recent history, a disaster that will be with us for years to come. Our deepest condolences go to the families of those who have lost loved ones.

The disaster has hurt millions, depriving them of their livelihoods, of everything they have. Now we must focus on them. We must make sure that immediate humanitarian aid can reach all the affected communities, many of which now are displaced. This is a race against time, and if we lose the race, more people may die from disease, lack of clean water and malnutrition than from the tsunami itself. There is also an urgent need to provide support to the many who are suffering from shock and loss. Here, highest priority must be given to the special needs of children.

Sexual exploitation and trafficking in human beings often increase in the aftermath of a crisis. We are pleased to see the emphasis on the need to protect women and children against violence and sexual abuse in the request for humanitarian assistance in the emergency phase.

Effective coordination of humanitarian assistance at all levels, based on actual needs, is imperative. We must all work together if our joint efforts are to have maximum effect. Norway supports United Nations coordination at all levels in the emergency and early reconstruction phases, in close cooperation with national and local authorities.

Access to the areas concerned is crucial for the effective delivery of humanitarian assistance. The prime responsibility lies with the Governments of the affected countries to ensure safe access.

The United Nations clearly proved its ability to play a leadership role and to mobilize international support in the early phase of the tsunami. The response to the flash appeal for the urgent and immediate needs of communities most severely affected, launched less than two weeks ago in Jakarta, is unprecedented.

A record number of countries are contributing generously to the tsunami crisis. In that regard, long-term commitments from the international community are vital. We must help to rebuild livelihoods and communities. In that regard, the particular needs of women and children must be met.

As regards donor coordination, a clear division of labour must be established, both in the emergency phase and the reconstruction phase. The donors must not compete with each other in providing assistance for a short period after the disaster, only to disappear when media attention moves elsewhere.

Norway is in favour of a mechanism that tracks donor pledges in major humanitarian and reconstruction operations such as these and is pleased to see the initiative taken by United Nations in this regard. There is a need for seamless transition from humanitarian assistance to rehabilitation, reconstruction and long-term development. In fact, these efforts must overlap.

As for Norway's assistance, we have so far disbursed approximately $17 million in humanitarian assistance. In addition, we will provide approximately $170 million as an extra-budgetary allocation for humanitarian relief, reconstruction and development assistance in the affected areas. In addition, Norwegian individuals and private companies have so far contributed more than $60 million.

We must also consider ways of improving the systems for preventing and limiting the effects of natural disasters such as tsunamis. Early warning systems must be improved, but we should also consider how to make societies more resilient. The World Congress on Disaster Prevention, which opened in Kobe, Japan, earlier today, is an excellent opportunity to pursue this issue in more concrete terms. We know that the future will bring more natural disasters. It is not in our power to prevent this from happening. But it is in our power to decide how to prepare for and respond to such situations. Our despair over the enormity of this disaster must be channelled into motivation to ensure much better preparedness next time nature strikes. Our compassion for the millions of victims in Asia must translate into concrete support and long-term attention.

Mr. Kim Sam-hoon (Republic of Korea): The Government and the people of the Republic of Korea stand in solidarity with all those who have suffered from the recent earthquake and tsunami disaster in the Indian Ocean. We mourn the loss of those who have perished, and we extend our deepest sympathy and condolences to the families of the victims.

The devastation inflicted by the earthquake and tsunami is of such epic proportions that the world is still struggling to come to terms with it. However, in the face of such horror, the spirit of cooperation and friendship that the countries of the world have demonstrated in coming to the aid of the countries affected has been truly remarkable.

The Governments and peoples of the countries affected deserve the highest praise, for they are the ones who have suffered and yet they remain at the forefront of the relief efforts. At the same time, the massive international assistance effort that has emerged is a testament to the global community's ability to put aside political differences and unite behind a common cause. The United Nations, as coordinator of the international community's response, has distinguished itself once again as the world's pre-eminent body for tackling the global challenges of the twenty-first century.

My Government is committed to providing not only immediate relief but also medium- and long-term assistance to ensure that full reconstruction and recovery are realized. Accordingly, in addition to $5 million in emergency relief, we have pledged another $45 million over the next three years for rehabilitation and reconstruction assistance. Furthermore, we

dispatched a military cargo plane to Sri Lanka and cargo carriers carrying transportation and construction equipment to Indonesia to assist in the delivery of relief material and reconstruction. We will be closely following rebuilding efforts and considering further ways to contribute to the recovery process.

The tsunami disaster has underscored the need to establish an integrated tsunami early warning system for the Indian Ocean region. Such a system would enable countries at risk to exchange information on disaster forecasts and to undertake a joint response to natural disasters. In that regard, we have high expectations for the World Conference on Disaster Reduction, which is currently being held in Kobe, Japan. We sincerely hope that the Conference will achieve concrete and tangible outcomes that will contribute to the establishment of an early warning system for the region.

For our part, my Government stands ready actively to contribute its expertise in information technology to expedite the establishment of such a system.

Furthermore, as the country holding the chairmanship of this year's Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation Summit, the Republic of Korea places a high priority on disaster prevention and assistance and will actively lead cooperation efforts to enhance the preventive capabilities of member countries.

The current disaster relief efforts have brought to the fore the increasingly vital role played by civil society and non-governmental organizations in providing effective emergency relief and rehabilitation. From Indonesia to Sri Lanka and throughout the entire region, we have seen private aid groups, charities, non-governmental organizations and concerned citizens lending their assistance to those in need.

My Government strongly supports the role of local and global civil society in emergency relief. My country has established a Public-Private Assistance Partnership Forum, which undertakes nationwide donation campaigns and dispatches medical and relief volunteers to areas where they are most needed. Through that partnership, cash and goods worth more than $15 million have been provided by civil society and the business community, and more than 900 relief and medical personnel were sent from both the Government and non-governmental organizations to the tsunami-affected areas.

With the passing of time, humanitarian emergencies tend to be forgotten, especially when new emergencies occur that divert the attention of the global community. As we say in our country, the beginning is like the head of a dragon, but the ending is like the tail of a snake.

This time, we must not forget. We must ensure that the pledges are fulfilled and that assistance is provided for as long as it is needed. Moreover, assistance must be accurately targeted and appropriate to the needs of the people. We applaud the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs for moving in that direction, and we welcome its measures to enhance the transparency of the distribution process for tsunami funds.

We cannot afford to have to say in hindsight that the global response to the tsunami of December 2004 was business as usual. As unprecedented as the devastation has been, let us endeavour to make the effectiveness of the response reach new levels. The Republic of Korea is committed to that end.

Ms. Dovzhenko (Ukraine) (*spoke in Russian*): At the outset, on behalf of the Government of Ukraine, I would like to express our sincere condolences to the peoples of the countries that were stricken by the unprecedented natural disaster that occurred on 26 December 2004, which claimed hundreds of thousands of lives and caused enormous material and environmental damage. For me, as a member of the Government of Ukraine responsible for issues related to children, families and young people, and as a woman and mother, the news of the deaths of tens of thousands of people was especially bitter.

In response to this challenge, the Government of Ukraine immediately provided humanitarian assistance to the stricken countries and decided to make a financial contribution to UNICEF to provide assistance to the children who had suffered from the tsunami in South-East Asia. In our view, it was the effective cooperation among the Governments of the stricken countries, the relevant United Nations bodies, donor associations and non-governmental organizations that enabled us to provide emergency assistance in a very short period of time to those who had suffered as a result of this catastrophe.

However, that machinery requires further improvement. First and foremost, the effectiveness of such operations in saving lives and material resources

depends on the warning time for a looming threat and on how soon rescue operations begin when an emergency has occurred. In that connection, we believe it necessary to create a global rapid-reaction mechanism for implementing the steps needed to provide emergency humanitarian assistance, including implementing reserve agreements and exchanging information concerning existing resources in specific countries and the possibilities of providing assistance. We cannot afford to delay in finding solutions to those issues.

Ukraine, which experienced the worst technological catastrophe in history — the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear facility — is prepared to participate actively in the establishment of such a global mechanism at all levels. We believe that, during the United Nations summit this fall, it would be appropriate to submit specific proposals in that regard for consideration by Member States. In that connection, we welcome the proposal by the Government of Germany to hold a third international conference on early warning to discuss aspects of the global early warning system for waterborne meteorological and geological disasters. We call upon countries to actively promote that initiative.

We note with satisfaction that the draft resolution proposed by a group of countries contains concrete measures that could help us make today's world safer. In that connection, we announce our intention to join the list of sponsors of that document.

Because of the current trends of development and globalization, our world is becoming increasingly interdependent each year. Only together will we be able to reduce our vulnerability to disasters. The role of the United Nations is to ensure that all our efforts, in all countries, benefit our children and future generations.

Mr. Moeini Meybodi (Islamic Republic of Iran): Allow me to begin my statement by expressing the deep sadness of the people and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran at the tragedy of the recent earthquake and tsunami in the Indian Ocean and by expressing our sincere condolences to the people and the Governments of the affected countries. Today, we all gather here to express to them our sympathy and solidarity and to prove once again that, when calamity strikes, we are united in protecting and assisting our fellow human beings in need. Our appreciation goes to Mr. Jan Egeland and his able colleagues for their relentless efforts over the past three weeks in mobilizing and coordinating international relief efforts and assistance to the victims of this tragedy.

The recent tsunami, caused by an earthquake, was an unprecedented natural disaster with extensive and devastating effects. Many countries of the Indian Ocean were stricken by that brutal, swift and destructive disaster, whose impact was so widespread that more time is still required to assess the scope and extent of the damage. In addition, millions of people are suffering unimaginable physical and psychological trauma that will take a long time to heal.

The earthquake of 26 December 2004 took place precisely on the first anniversary of an earthquake that struck the city of Bam in my country and therefore brought back the painful memory of the great human losses caused by that catastrophe. After the tsunami, we witnessed the same swift response and generous spirit of solidarity on the part of the international community with the affected people. In that respect, we welcome the generous pledges and firm commitments of the international community, announced at the ministerial-level meeting held in Geneva last week, in response to the United Nations flash appeal for the tsunami-affected countries.

The Secretary-General, in referring to the Bam earthquake a few days ago, emphasized that "not all the money that was pledged for the Iran crisis has been disbursed". In fact, out of a total of $800 million in pledges, only $17 million has been disbursed one year after the disaster. We hope that this time, in response to the tsunami tragedy, all promises will be kept to assist the countries concerned in beginning the long-term efforts needed to rebuild the affected areas.

The experience of the recent tsunami and similar disasters remind us of the need for systematic and more coordinated international search-and-rescue operations. That would enable us to take full advantage of the crucial hours following the disasters and would save the greatest possible number of lives.

Although we should pay due attention to the post-disaster situation, a multi-hazard and well balanced approach to all phases of disaster management — including preparedness, relief, rehabilitation and long-term reconstruction — is absolutely necessary if any comprehensive disaster risk management strategy is to be successful. Therefore, we should focus more closely

on promoting measures that increase countries' resilience after natural disasters and reduce the devastating consequences of those disasters. In that regard, we hope that the World Conference on Disaster Reduction being held in Kobe, Japan, will see the adoption of effective and comprehensive policies and measures aimed at natural disaster management at all levels and that it will lay the foundation for an effective global partnership to implement such policies.

Although it may not be possible to prevent natural disasters, there are ways and means to at least mitigate their effects. Iran — especially after the devastating earthquake in Bam — is fully aware of the fundamental need to enhance disaster management capacities at the local and community levels. Equally important is the strengthening of regional and international capacities to support the national efforts of vulnerable countries. In that regard, there is a need to establish specialized regional cooperation centres that facilitate the exchange of scientific and technical know-how and equipment as well as the experiences of the affected countries. It is also imperative to promote international efforts in the fields of early warning and information exchange and to use the latest communications and surveillance technologies so that the negative consequences of similar tragedies may be curbed in the future. The use of satellite and remote-sensing technologies is particularly important for reducing the adverse consequences of natural disasters.

In that context, the situation of developing countries is unique. Serious technical, technological and financial challenges severely deepen the impact of disasters on the socio-economic infrastructure and the environment of developing countries. It is therefore crucial that we study measures to improve the response capacity of those countries and redirect the international community's support towards promoting access to related technologies and their transfer to the developing countries.

Needless to say, the principles of neutrality, humanity and impartiality should continue to guide all measures taken to provide humanitarian assistance to countries when natural disasters occur. Humanitarian assistance, including the provision of adequate resources upon the request of the Governments concerned, should be provided during all phases of a disaster.

On the day after the tsunami tragedy, the Islamic Republic of Iran began sending relief consignments to the disaster-struck areas and took part in the international relief operations. Now I have the pleasure to announce that the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran intends to allocate $3.9 million in cash and approximately 223 tons of new relief items, valued at $1 million, in response to the flash appeal. The necessary arrangements to fulfil our pledge will be completed soon.

In conclusion, I would like to reaffirm once again our strong support to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and express our appreciation for its remarkable activities at this crucial juncture.

Mr. Al-Jomae (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): First, on behalf of the Government and the people of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, I extend our sincere condolences to the Governments and the peoples of the countries affected by the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster that struck South-East Asia and part of the coast of Africa, resulting in thousands of innocent victims and damaging the economic and social infrastructure of those countries.

In spite of the heroic response of Member States in providing humanitarian assistance, we believe that humanitarian assistance is not a substitute for prevention or action to reduce risks associated with natural disasters, such as creating an early warning system to warn of future tsunamis and other natural disasters. The World Conference on Disaster Reduction, now being held in Kobe, Japan, is a praiseworthy international initiative to study the necessary machinery and measures to help States deal with and avoid natural disasters.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has pledged $30 million for those States affected by the tsunami, both in direct aid and through international organizations specialized in humanitarian assistance. Public donations in various provinces of our Kingdom currently total $80 million. In addition, the Islamic Development Bank has announced that it will extend credits totalling $500 million to assist those affected by the Asian earthquake. The Minister for Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia, Prince Saud Al-Faisal, met with the ambassadors of the member States of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) to study possible joint efforts to be taken by OIC member States in order to

provide rapid assistance for the victims of the earthquake and tsunami, which left more than 35,000 orphans in Indonesia alone.

Finally, I welcome the vital role of the United Nations in mitigating the effects of the natural disaster.

Ms. Nguyen (Canada) (*spoke in French*): Canada would first like to extend its deepest sympathies to all the nations, communities, families and individuals affected by the earthquake and tsunami of 26 December 2004. The magnitude of the loss of human life and the destruction impacting such a huge number of people is beyond the realm of understanding. Canadians mourn for those who have lost their lives, and our hearts go out to the tens of thousands of people affected by that disaster.

We commend the local communities, which were the first to respond following the disaster. We honour the humanitarian workers and all those who are uniting their efforts worldwide to provide the essentials for living to those left destitute. We are amazed at the acts of charity and the overwhelming demonstration of world solidarity, which the President of Indonesia described as a demonstration of global unity.

As the initial shock subsides, it is incumbent upon all of us to ensure a timely, flexible, coordinated and effective global response to this global tragedy. We are confident that the affected populations will recover and rebuild their communities. We applaud the leadership role taken by the Governments of the affected countries with regard to recovery and reconstruction. The role of the international community is to support the efforts of those Governments. The immediate humanitarian needs are immense. The long-term reconstruction needs have yet to be determined, but it is obvious that the situation will require sustained effort and unflagging commitment for some time to come.

Canada will do its part to respond to those expectations. We have committed $425 million towards a comprehensive package of disaster relief measures for disaster victims and reconstruction assistance. The commitment of the Government of Canada over the next five years includes a contribution that matches the donations made by Canadians, who over the past few days have demonstrated great generosity to Canadian non-governmental organizations involved in relief efforts on the ground. Our commitment also involves ongoing reconstruction assistance for the areas affected by the disaster and an immediate debt moratorium for any of the countries affected by the crisis that request it.

(*spoke in English*)

Canada fully supports the United Nations as the premier organization to coordinate the international response to the crisis and is working with other countries in support of the United Nations role. The United Nations, in partnership with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and well-established non-governmental organizations, has both the mandate and the expertise to ensure an effective and needs-based response to this dramatic crisis. In that regard, we have supported the United Nations flash appeal and the consolidated appeal recently announced in Geneva.

The principles of humanitarian action must guide our efforts. We the Governments must effectively coordinate our respective involvement, demonstrate flexibility and concentrate our assistance on needs and demand in order to best support and strengthen the central role of the United Nations in coordinating international humanitarian assistance. The people of donor countries have contributed generously in the form of donations and various types of involvement to help the victims, and they will expect that the aid be distributed effectively and that it find its way as quickly as possible to the individuals and the communities affected by the disaster.

Our involvement must also focus on national capacity-building so that we can be ready for such crises and alleviate their impact. The partners of the affected countries play a vital role. We are pleased with the spirit of cooperation that has directed the relief efforts to date and greatly facilitated access to humanitarian aid by the people who need it.

Respect for human rights and human dignity must be central to our efforts. It is vital that affected communities be full participants in the reconstruction activity and that women be integral to that process. It is also important to ensure that the vulnerable segments of the population, particularly women and children, receive assistance and to prevent all forms of exploitation. We applaud Government measures adopted in that regard. Moreover, since some of the regions devastated by the tsunami suffer from internal conflict, it is imperative that assistance not exacerbate

those tensions. Opportunities for peacebuilding should be sought out in the reconstruction phase.

Over the coming weeks, it will be crucial for us to reflect on the lessons from the disaster, particularly the importance of strengthening disaster preparedness and early warning mechanisms. The event has also reminded us of how poverty compounds the devastation caused by natural events. The World Conference on Disaster Reduction, which started today in Kobe, Japan, will provide a key opportunity to pursue such discussions.

Today, right now, we are connected by compassion, but we must not forget ongoing crises in other parts of the world, such as the Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Haiti. We must let those in distress know that we will be steadfast and that we will be there for them for as long as it takes.

Mr. İlkin (Turkey): My delegation has already aligned itself with the statement made by the representative of Luxembourg on behalf of the European Union. I would also like to stress the following.

Our deliberations today underline once again the deep shock and profound sorrow of the international community. The loss of more than 160,000 lives and the extensive devastation resulting from the earthquake and tsunami catastrophe in the South-East Asian and Indian Ocean region have been a human tragedy.

Our meeting today re-emphasizes the determination of the international community to provide full support and assistance to the Governments and peoples of the affected countries in their efforts to heal their wounds and launch a rehabilitation and reconstruction campaign. Our meeting today is therefore most timely and appropriate.

We all have full confidence in the determination and resilience of the stricken nations to rebuild their countries as soon as possible. Yet, the more the international community is prepared to help, the sooner the reconstruction of those countries can be realized. So far, the international community has acted with compassion and generosity. It is equally important that the support and assistance of the international community continue unabated.

The Turkish nation, which unfortunately experienced a major earthquake in 1999, wholeheartedly sympathizes with the nations affected by the latest natural disaster. On this sad occasion, I would kindly ask the representatives of those countries to convey once again to their Governments and their peoples the heartfelt condolences of the Government and people of Turkey.

Speaking of Turkey, my Government immediately joined others in responding to the emergency needs of the region. As a first step, cash donations were made to the countries affected. A search-and-rescue team was rushed to the area. Food, medicine, medical equipment and water purification units were flown to the two hardest-hit countries, Indonesia and Sri Lanka. A Turkish Red Crescent team is in the region and will remain there to contribute to humanitarian relief operations for the next five months. A medical team of 37 people, of whom 15 are doctors, will soon start offering medical services to the inhabitants of the Aceh region of Indonesia. Turks in Turkey, as well as those around the world, are participating actively in the fund-raising campaigns initiated by our Government and by Turkish private and civil organizations. The Turkish Foreign Ministry is also actively involved in a donation campaign of its own. As of today, the official and private donations and contributions of Turkey are in the vicinity of $15 million. Turkey will continue to do everything possible to help alleviate the suffering of the tsunami victims.

In my capacity as the Chairman of the group of States members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), I conveyed to you, Sir, our group's support for the proposal of the group of States members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to call the General Assembly to a meeting today. I would also like to reiterate the deep sorrow of the OIC Group, as well as its determination to be in full solidarity with the missions of the relevant countries.

As will be recalled, the Secretary-General of the OIC made an appeal to the member countries on 1 January to mobilize assistance to the region. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, Mr. Gül, in his capacity as the current Chairman of the OIC foreign ministers, has also sent a letter to the foreign ministers of 56 member countries in support of the appeal. A committee composed of the Secretary-General of the OIC, the President of the Islamic Development Bank and representatives of Malaysia, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia and Turkey has been established to coordinate the humanitarian and relief assistance of member

countries for the victims, and particularly for orphans in Indonesia. Members of the OIC and its subsidiary institutions and organs are trying their best to help disaster-stricken countries and will continue to do so.

We all know that we cannot bring back those who have perished, but the international community must take all necessary measures to avoid facing such a tragedy ever again. Hence, Turkey strongly supports ASEAN's decision to establish a regional mechanism on disaster prevention, particularly a regional early warning system in the Indian Ocean and South-East Asian region. My country stands ready to contribute as much as it can to the international efforts in that field, too.

Last but not least, I would like to express our deep appreciation and sincere commendation to the Secretary-General, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and all other United Nations bodies and agencies for their prompt action and tireless work to initiate and coordinate the largest humanitarian relief effort in the Organization's history.

Mr. Noghès (Monaco) (*spoke in French*): At the end of 2004, at a time when the world usually allows itself a brief rest, nature managed to show us that a catastrophe of relatively short duration, but of extreme violence, could change the course of existence in many countries at once, taking the life of tens of thousands of women, men and children; causing even more people to go missing; and leaving behind devastated sites, causing important health risks for the survivors.

To all those countries and populations so gravely affected, we reiterate our feelings of compassion and solidarity. We commend with great respect the courage shown by the authorities and the populations involved, who mobilized to help the wounded and to find a great number of the missing. We praise the remarkable efforts the United Nations made in such a short time, as well as those of the many countries that showed such solidarity in the face of this ordeal.

Through the initiative of the Sovereign Prince of Monaco, our small country has, to the best of its ability, participated greatly in the immense outpouring of generosity shown by Governments, organizations, associations and the public. The Government of Monaco made an immediate contribution of $130,000 to the United Nations' Office of the Emergency Relief Coordinator, and the same amount was given to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies by the Monaco Red Cross, chaired by Crown Prince Albert, which to date has received more than $1.4 million in donations.

The World Association of Children's Friends, presided over by Her Royal Highness the Princess of Hanover, decided to allocate funds received to the restoration of schools and health-care centres. Similarly, Monegasque non-governmental organizations are striving to take concrete actions. For example, the Monaco Aid and Presence Association is making a special contribution to the Princess Grace Orphanage in Kalutara, Sri Lanka.

This terrible tragedy has shown how greatly the world can act in such circumstances. It has also shown that the media can play a significant role in such a mobilization and that it might also contribute to meeting the needs of populations that are deeply distressed although not themselves victims of the disaster.

Let us remember, however, that much remains to be done in terms of natural disaster prevention, in particular through the creation of effective warning systems and that we should establish a body for designing the response to a disaster of such an unforeseen nature and scale. For that reason, the Principality of Monaco has decided to sponsor draft resolution A/59/L.58.

Mr. Mammadov (Azerbaijan): First, let me, on behalf of the people and the Government of Azerbaijan, extend our deepest condolences to the victims and the families of the victims of the tsunami disaster that took place in the Indian Ocean. Azerbaijan sincerely shares the grief of the peoples of the affected countries and expresses its deep sympathy to and solidarity with all the bereaved. The scale and the impact of that devastating disaster clearly demonstrated the vulnerability of the countries of the Indian Ocean region and their limited capacity to respond effectively and in a timely fashion to unforeseen natural disasters. The lack of effective early warning mechanisms, which prevented the tsunami-affected countries from being prepared for the horrific disaster, was another bitter lesson for us all.

In that connection, we expect practical outcomes from the World Conference on Disaster Reduction now being held in Kobe, Japan, from 18 to 22 January. We believe that the Conference will succeed in establishing

the necessary framework for our future action to prevent and prepare for natural disasters.

We fully support the efforts of the international community in response to the urgent needs of the communities severely affected by the tsunami and welcome the United Nations flash appeal for the Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami. We highly commend the work done by the United Nations, in particular the tireless efforts of the Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Jan Egeland, and his able team in coordinating assistance to the affected countries. It is essential that close cooperation and coordination among the Governments of the affected countries, the donor community, United Nations entities and international aid agencies are continued in order to ensure the efficiency of assistance.

For its part, Azerbaijan has allocated $1 million to United Nations emergency humanitarian assistance for immediate relief needs. We believe that international solidarity and assistance must continue beyond the immediate disaster period and focus on two parallel activities: reconstruction and rehabilitation and the establishment of an early warning system in the Indian Ocean. We attach particular importance to the establishment of such a system in the region and stand ready to support the affected countries in their efforts to that end.

As a result of the tsunami, according to the latest count, at least 160,000 people lost their lives, more than half a million were injured, and 5 million others, including more than 1 million children, were left without basic services. We are deeply concerned about the health needs of populations worst affected by the tsunami and support the World Health Organization in carrying out the five key tasks that will be the focus of its work in the coming months. We fully share the view that urgent action should be taken to address the need for early warning to pre-empt the spread of the epidemics and deadly diseases that can follow hard on the heels of natural disasters.

The emergency phase is rapidly shifting to recovery and rehabilitation. During that transition, sustained support should be provided to ensure that medium- and long-term needs of victims, in particular those of children, are adequately addressed.

Azerbaijan welcomes and supports the initiative of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in submitting a draft resolution on strengthening emergency relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and prevention in the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster. We believe that adoption of the draft will serve to mobilize more international assistance in terms of both immediate relief and long-term recovery. We hope that through the implementation of the draft resolution we will succeed in addressing our concerns with respect to the strengthening of mechanisms to prevent, mitigate and respond to the natural disasters.

Mr. Baum (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): The tragedy that struck South-East Asia on 26 December 2004 was one of the worst of the modern age. Its toll surpasses understanding. We are all struck with humility before these forces of nature that are beyond human scale. We thank the countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations for their initiative, which has gathered us here today. The draft resolution that we are preparing to adopt is representative of the will of the affected countries and the international community to respond rapidly and concretely to that tragedy. The draft resolution underlines the importance of reducing the vulnerability of States and populations to the risks posed by nature, in particular through a culture of prevention and preparation at all levels. The draft resolution underlines the importance of effective and sustained cooperation to support long-term efforts, taking into account the specific needs of the most vulnerable sectors of the population, including children. It reminds us of the importance of transparency and responsibility in the allocation and use of resources.

Switzerland immediately reacted to the crisis. It released $23 million in emergency assistance and deployed three helicopters and 50 soldiers to Aceh in the service of humanitarian organizations. In close coordination with United Nations system, and in particular with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, and jointly with the peoples and authorities concerned, Switzerland dispatched approximately 100 specialists to the field, which it made available to international humanitarian agencies.

Swiss private donations also reached a record level — $145 million to date. Switzerland is also committed to the formulation of adequate responses on the part of financial institutions and of intergovernmental institutions such as the Paris Club. Other measures will also be taken.

The tragedy that we are confronting must not make us forget the many other humanitarian crises currently taking place. Many other victims are in need of assistance and protection. The admirable response of the international community to the Asian crisis should not be to the detriment of necessary programmes elsewhere in the world, be it in the field of humanitarian assistance, cooperation for development, or the promotion of peace and of human rights.

The combat against poverty must remain the cornerstone of our actions. While natural disasters ravage poor and rich countries like, people living in poverty are more susceptible to them because of the following factors: less solid housing; insufficient access to means of communication; bad roads that make it more difficult to flee the danger or to assist the victims; and more fragile health infrastructures.

Emergency assistance is useful, but it is only that — emergency assistance. It is reconstruction and development assistance that puts us squarely on the path of sustainability.

Finally, this meeting coincides with the opening of the World Conference on Disaster Prevention in Kobe. That Conference provides an opportunity to develop strategies for prevention, preparation, education and response with respect to various kinds of disasters.

We must make up for any delays in those areas in order better to deal with future challenges. Switzerland also hopes that the Kobe Conference will promote the strengthening of the relevant structures in the context of the United Nations international strategy for disaster prevention.

Mr. Dapkiunas (Belarus): There are watershed events in life, and the tragedy in the Indian Ocean is set to become such a watershed for the whole of humankind. The tremendous scale of the resulting devastation and human suffering makes us question the limits of what is possible for humankind. It may also teach us a few important lessons.

Compassion and human solidarity, which transcend state borders, will save the world. We admire the truly generous assistance provided by the major developed and developing countries, international organizations, and public and private donors. Relief campaigns of this kind are the only kind of nobly motivated money race — the kind that enables true international leaders to emerge, not by claim or force but through recognition.

We highly commend the fast, coordinated and effective emergency relief efforts of the United Nations system. They alone are sufficient proof of the increasing relevance and importance of our Organization.

The people of Belarus convey their sympathy and compassion to all the people who lost their loved ones in the killing waves. As people are doing in dozens of nations throughout the world, Belarusians are grieving and giving. Belarus is not a donor country, but we, too, are doing what we can to help. A week ago today, dozens of tons of food, living essentials and technological equipment, including 125 advanced water purification systems — with a total value of more than $100,000 — were delivered, by decision of the President of Belarus, to one of the countries most affected by the disaster — Sri Lanka.

The world was not prepared for the disaster, but it could have been. People were powerless in face of the calamity; they should not have been. The establishment of comprehensive disaster early-warning systems — not just tsunami-related and not just regionally — has become a truly vital factor for world security. Real progress in meeting the challenge of preventing such a horrible loss of human life can be made only when we finally understand a simple truth — for killer waves, earthquakes and hurricanes, the world is not one of States and regions; it is simply one world. That destructive force can be effectively countered only with the unified effort of the world community. In that connection, we welcome the practical proposals made from this rostrum by the representatives of Japan and of the United States.

In view of the recent drastic increase in the frequency and intensity of severe natural calamities and the ever-higher degree of vulnerability of the developing countries, the international community should take prompt and decisive measures. The United Nations has to take the lead in this respect.

Last but not least, it would be only fair — not to mention noble and right — for the enormous volume of emergency assistance provided and pledged to the affected countries not to be subtracted from the development assistance commitments made by major world donors before the disaster struck. Should donor countries take the easier way in these calculations, they

will have betrayed the expectations of billions of people in the developing world and the hope that human solidarity can not only deal with the effects of disasters but actually help, one day, to prevent them. But it is our belief that they will not be.

Mr. Sardenberg (Brazil) (*spoke in Spanish*): Brazil welcomes the convening of this meeting of the General Assembly on the strengthening of disaster relief assistance and rehabilitation, reconstruction and prevention activities following the disaster caused by the tsunami in the Indian Ocean. It provides an opportunity for States Members as a whole to convey our deep sorrow and sincere condolences to the families of the victims and to the Governments and peoples of those Indian Ocean States that suffered a tremendous loss of life and socio-economic and environmental damage as a result of the tsunami. It provides us also with an opportunity to commend the leadership assumed by the affected States as well as the speedy mobilization and response on the part of the international community in the area of relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction, and to express our full support for such work.

Brazil welcomes the pledges made by donor countries and international financial institutions. We urge all donors to make good on their pledges without delay and to continue to provide the necessary funds and assistance for rehabilitation and reconstruction activities. We are concerned about the medium- and long-term social, economic and environmental consequences of the disaster in the affected countries. The international community's commitment must be sustained. We agree that we must not lose our focus once we have moved past the emergency stage. We must maintain the political will to support the affected countries and their peoples, particularly the poor, so that they can fully recover from the traumatic effects of the disaster and rebuild their lives.

Brazil responded immediately to the disaster. Four aircraft were sent to the region, the first of which reached Bangkok on 1 January with 160 tons of medicines, foodstuffs and water. The genuine solidarity of the Brazilian people with the victims of the tsunami resulted in the collection of a further 100 tons of water, medicine, clothing and foodstuffs, which is being gathered throughout the country to be packed up and dispatched. Furthermore, the Government is preparing to send medical and engineer units to assist in reconstruction and also in demining efforts.

As we all know, the disaster has had an impact on many States and nationalities throughout the world. It was with great sadness that we learned of the loss of our esteemed colleague, Counsellor Lys Amayo D'Avola, a Brazilian diplomat who was serving in Bangkok, and of his 10-year-old son, Gianluca.

My delegation would like to emphasize the importance of international cooperation in supporting the efforts under way in the countries affected with a view to dealing with all aspects of natural disasters. The convening today of the Kobe World Conference on Disaster Reduction is an opportunity to draw up a framework for a disaster reduction strategy for this century. We support the idea of creating, as a matter of urgency, regional mechanisms for monitoring, early warning and assessment to deal with hydrometeorological and geological dangers at the global level. Donor countries and international financial institutions should provide additional funds so that all countries can fully implement disaster reduction strategies and mechanisms.

While certain horrific crises are often highlighted by the main global media, others seem, unfortunately, to be almost ignored. The lack of support for so-called forgotten emergencies is a subject that requires our careful attention. We must ensure that humanitarian assistance is provided on a non-discriminatory, well-balanced and proportional basis. Humanitarian assistance must be provided on the basis of existing needs.

In the case of the tsunami disaster in the Indian Ocean, we greatly welcome the effective cooperation among the affected States, the United Nations system and its family, donor countries, developing countries, international financial institutions and civil society in the coordination and provision of humanitarian assistance.

It is encouraging to see that the international community has confronted this catastrophe in a true spirit of cooperation. We hope that this favourable climate of solidarity will continue and will serve as an example of how to respond to other crises and grave problems. We hope that the resources mobilized as a result of this tragedy will truly be additional resources, and that they will not come at the expense of economic and social "tsunamis", such as poverty, hunger, and HIV/AIDS.

Mr. Chowdhury (Bangladesh): The Furies have unleashed themselves upon the Earth once again, this time with unspeakable ferocity in the form of the Asian tsunami. It left behind catastrophic death and destruction, untold misery and immeasurable suffering. In the wake of such dreadful devastation, the international community displayed a sense of solidarity that fills us with justifiable pride. It responded promptly and generously, with feeling and humanity. The United Nations appropriately assumed a leadership role, in conjunction with the affected countries. Governments and civil society forged a unity in the face of such stupendous adversity. These were commendable reactions.

My own country, despite its many and varied constraints, joined the relief operations at a very early stage. We dispatched ships and aircraft loaded with necessities, as well as troops to assist those affected. As all are aware, Bangladesh itself has been relentlessly buffeted by the vagaries of nature. But years of tireless endeavour have enabled us to devise systems and to reorganize infrastructures so we can predict, withstand and reduce the impact of natural calamities. These are experiences that we will be happy to share with societies of comparable milieu in due course.

While we cannot prevent natural disasters, today we have the wherewithal to mitigate their effects. We have the technology to make predictions. The United Nations can, and should, coordinate this regionally and globally. The proposal to set up a tsunami warning system in the Indian Ocean region deserves our strong support.

An early warning in itself will not be sufficient to save life and property. It must be accompanied by relevant and adequate protection and relocation programmes. In our own case, we have devised an intricate system in Bangladesh to extend the warning to the remotest corners of the country, to immediately mobilize thousands of urban and rural volunteers and to help the population reach hardened shelters. As a result, human fatalities from disasters have been vastly reduced.

The paramount challenge for the affected communities is always rehabilitation and reconstruction. The international community, under United Nations leadership, must keep adequate resources readily available for disaster-prone countries. The relevant multilateral institutions should sharpen their focus on the environment so that human tampering with nature is reduced. As we meet today, the World Conference on Disaster Reduction is being held in Kobe, Japan, with a view to launching a new framework for action to increase the world's resilience in the event of natural disasters. Also, in February Bangladesh will host a summit of South Asian leaders of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, at which the tsunami and related issues will be high on the agenda.

To fight disasters, we need determination. It is also Bangladesh's experience that, in such cases, we have also been helped by the pervasive cultures of pluralism and democratic values that render public actions more accountable and authorities more responsible. That helps to create the necessary degree of social mobilization and popular participation. The results, as we have seen, have always been positive.

Out of chaos is often born the dancing star. From such tragedies we take lessons, and learn. Nature and man have lived in harmony. They have also been in conflict. But at all times man has eventually triumphed. Let the United Nations, man's greatest multilateral institution, retool and revamp itself to be better able to confront calamities and, where it can, harmonize the relationship between man and nature. That is not too tall an order, and, in any case, as has been said, man's reach should exceed his grasp, for what else are heavens for?

Mr. Aspelund (Iceland): First, I would like to join all my colleagues in expressing our deepest condolences to the victims of the tsunami tragedy. No continent has fully escaped the effects of that violent natural phenomenon, although countries in the Indian Ocean and the South-East Asian region have been particularly hard hit. In some of those countries, entire communities have been swept away, and survivors have been left with severe psychological trauma, in addition to being exposed to the risks brought about by destroyed infrastructure and a lack of essential supplies. There is a risk that development will be set back several years if the necessary aid is not forthcoming.

Iceland would like to commend the rapid action taken by the United Nations humanitarian agencies and by many non-governmental organizations (NGOs). We also commend the actions of all contributing nations, in

particular of the authorities of those nations most badly affected.

The immediate humanitarian emergency continues. The Icelandic Government has already donated approximately $2.5 million, of which more than $500,000 will go to UNICEF, the World Food Programme and a number of NGOs for immediate humanitarian work.

But we are also very aware of the long-term needs in those countries. As part of a significant across-the-board increase in its development aid, Iceland had already decided to allocate 25 million Icelandic krónur for development cooperation with Sri Lanka. That aid will be tripled to 75 million krónur, equal to $1.2 million. Our development aid agency will carry out a reassessment in the light of the recent disaster with a view to contributing as effectively as possible to reconstruction.

In addition, the Icelandic people as a whole have shown solidarity with the victims of the tsunami. So far, some $4 million has been collected by NGOs through public donations. That is approximately $13 per Icelander.

As a country well aware of the impact of earthquakes and other natural disasters and of the destructive power of the sea, Iceland will continue to follow developments and will seek to contribute where it can. We support the importance attached to establishing as quickly as possible an early warning system in the Indian Ocean.

Mrs. Taylor Roberts (Jamaica): My delegation wishes to thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's meeting at the request of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations group. It is entirely appropriate that the General Assembly should devote specific attention to the recent earthquake and tsunami disaster, which has brought devastation on an unprecedented scale to island and coastal States in the Indian Ocean. We mourn the loss of life and the anguish of the survivors.

The magnitude of the catastrophe requires a commensurate response from the global community. The States affected are all developing countries, and for them this is a major calamity: billions of dollars in damage and the destruction of economic livelihoods.

The world response has so far been commendable, and generous offers of assistance have been pledged and delivered. With respect to the emergency relief efforts under way, we appreciate the positive role played by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in cooperation with donor countries, international agencies and non-governmental organizations. We note in particular the timely launch of the flash appeal by the Secretary-General at the international conference held in Jakarta on 6 January, and the positive response in terms of pledges and actual contributions by many Member States, including developing countries, to assist the affected countries with emergency relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction.

Recognizing the scale of the tragedy, the Government of Jamaica, notwithstanding the economic difficulties facing the country, has also played its part by making a contribution of 15 million Jamaican dollars and has put in place arrangements for contributions by the public at large.

The flash appeal that has been launched covers a six-month period. Our focus at this meeting should go beyond that time frame. Simultaneous action on a longer-term strategy should be considered and should cover the broad picture of disaster prevention management and recovery. We identify three elements.

First, while emergency relief is the first priority, plans for rehabilitation and reconstruction in the devastated countries have to be developed. Specific programmes and special arrangements for economic recovery, with necessary financial resources and incentives for the affected countries and States, should be devised.

Secondly, there is clear need for increased cooperation on an early warning system capable of speedy communication of information on earth movements and threatening atmospheric patterns. We welcome the intention of the organizers of the World Conference on Disaster Reduction, which opened today in Kobe, Japan, to propose a special session on the issue at the Conference.

Thirdly, there is continuing need to develop and strengthen national and regional capacity in disaster management and mitigation. Local and regional response teams will always be the first line of defence against the destructive impact of natural disasters.

In recent times, developing countries, especially island and coastal States, have suffered very severe

setbacks in development prospects due to natural disasters. In the Caribbean, we have our own experience with hurricanes, and during the last season we suffered widespread devastation. That most recent tragedy has dramatically illustrated the vulnerability and hazards many of us will continue to face from nature's destructive potential. We believe that this experience should serve to strengthen the spirit of cooperation, partnership and joint efforts in disaster prevention and relief operations based on human solidarity and common purpose.

The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.

United Nations A/59/PV.79

General Assembly

Fifty-ninth session

Official Records

79th plenary meeting
Wednesday, 19 January 2005, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Ping ..... (Gabon)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 39 (*continued*)

Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance

Draft resolution (A/59/L.58)

Mr. MacKay (New Zealand): New Zealand expresses its deepest condolences to the countries and communities affected by the unprecedented catastrophe that has struck parts of Asia and Africa. The immediate impact of the disaster was felt by millions of people. In addition to the tragic loss of life and the suffering caused by injury, many of the poor have had their livelihoods and other assets destroyed. We need to ensure that the poor and marginalized are the central focus of the reconstruction phase.

As recognized at the international meeting for the 10-year review of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, held last week in Mauritius, the tsunami has shown in stark terms the vulnerability of developing States, including small island developing States.

New Zealand has been among those actively offering assistance since the earliest days of the tragedy. We have been assisting directly in the field as well as through the international community, and we strongly support the operations mounted by and through the United Nations system. We have augmented that support with direct bilateral assistance to some of the affected countries and by teaming up with other donors.

Prime Minister Helen Clark announced yesterday that New Zealand's official response to the relief and reconstruction efforts has climbed to 68 million New Zealand dollars, inclusive of the 10 million dollars already announced for the relief effort, and that it is New Zealand's largest response ever to an international relief and reconstruction programme. That level of support enables us in particular to make a substantial contribution to the United Nations flash appeal for the afflicted region, to continue to match the generous donations being made by individual New Zealanders to the appeals for funding and to target New Zealand aid funding to Aceh, on Sumatra.

The Government response will consist of the following: 20 million New Zealand dollars for United Nations tsunami relief efforts; 20 million New Zealand dollars for the bilateral programme of the New Zealand Agency for International Development (NZAID) in Indonesia to enable it to support relief, reconstruction and development work in Aceh; 19 million New Zealand dollars for dollar-for-dollar matching of public donations; 4 million New Zealand dollars for other contributions, including through non-governmental organizations; and 5 million New Zealand dollars to cover costs incurred by New Zealand Government departments and agencies in responding to the tsunami, particularly to fund the contribution of 25 New

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Zealand police and civilian staff deployed to the international disaster victim identification operation in Phuket, Thailand. About 113 New Zealand Defence Force personnel were deployed to the region with aircraft, loading and medical teams and communication specialists.

New Zealand will also support international efforts to assess tsunami risk and enhanced worldwide tsunami warning coverage. We look forward to the outcome of this week's World Conference on Disaster Reduction in Kobe, Japan.

The New Zealand relief and reconstruction response that I have just outlined is only the first step in what will be a long-term recovery process. Like others, we are looking to help during the next stages of rehabilitation and reconstruction. All donors need to ensure that their delivery of aid is credible through good humanitarian donorship; that it addresses poverty by distinguishing the needs of the poor; and that it is managed professionally by applying the principles of harmonization. And we must all, of course, ensure that our focus on this crisis does not divert us from international efforts to address chronic poverty in many other developing countries.

As we contemplate enhanced long-term bilateral support for Indonesia and the channelling of support for longer-term reconstruction and rehabilitation in Sri Lanka, let me conclude by saying that we will also strive to continue supporting the ongoing activities of United Nations agencies and programmes as they, too, move on to the next phases. New Zealand will be there for the long haul.

Practically no country has been left untouched by this disaster, including my own. In this respect, I should like to take this opportunity to express New Zealand's sincere gratitude for the assistance offered by our regional neighbours, and by Thailand in particular, to those New Zealanders who were caught up in the tragedy.

Mr. Jingree (Mauritius): On behalf of the Government and the people of the Republic of Mauritius, let me once again express our deep condolences to the families of the victims and to the peoples of those States that have suffered a huge loss of life and social and economic damage as a result of the earthquake and tsunami that struck the Indian Ocean and the South-East Asian region on 26 December 2004. The trauma caused by this disaster cannot be overestimated.

The disaster, unprecedented in its nature and scale, was matched by unprecedented worldwide solidarity with the affected populations. My delegation expresses appreciation for the prompt response of the international community through immediate relief efforts to the affected countries and the spontaneous and generous contributions of civil society, the private sector and individuals, highlighting once again the spirit of international solidarity.

My delegation wishes to commend the affected countries for the bold efforts that their respective authorities have displayed in addressing the aftermath of the earthquake and tsunami. I should also like to express our sincere appreciation for the important and immediate role played by the United Nations, particularly the personal involvement of Secretary-General Kofi Annan and the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Jan Egeland, in addressing the aftermath of the disaster and ensuring an optimally effective aid response, cooperation, mobilization and delivery of international assistance in the emergency relief phase.

Over and above the immediate emergency relief efforts, we must ensure support for the medium- and long-term rehabilitation and reconstruction and risk-reduction efforts of the Governments of the affected countries.

The recent earthquake and tsunami, and the spate of hurricanes that hit the Caribbean region last year, highlight the increasing number and scale of natural disasters and their growing impact, with massive loss of life and critical damage to socio-economic infrastructure. Their long-term negative social, economic and environmental effects cannot be overestimated, especially in relation to their impact on vulnerable groups in developing countries, including small islands.

My delegation wishes to underscore the importance of promoting the concrete realization of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, especially in relation to its provisions on vulnerability, risk assessment and disaster management. Disaster reduction, reducing vulnerability and building resilience in the event of natural disasters contribute to the achievement of sustainable development.

The recent earthquake and tsunami triggered a debate on the need for the establishment of regional early warning mechanisms for disaster prevention, development and the strengthening of response preparedness, mitigation and contingency planning, as well as measures to prepare communities for future disasters. Indeed, had the Indian Ocean had an early warning system, many lives could have been saved last month.

It was in this context that the Mauritius International Meeting to Review the Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, which concluded on Friday, 14 January, devoted a large part of its work to the tragic impact of the 26 December Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami. Almost every delegation represented at the International Meeting referred to the vulnerability of small island developing States to disasters such as the recent tsunami.

The Mauritius Declaration adopted at the International Meeting recognized the tragic impact of the earthquake and tsunami of 26 December 2004, as well as the spate of hurricanes that hit the Caribbean and Pacific regions, and stresses the need to develop and strengthen disaster risk-reduction, early warning systems, emergency relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts.

The Mauritius Declaration, while welcoming the Declaration of the Special Meeting of the leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, held in the aftermath of the recent tsunami, fully supports the proposed establishment of a regional natural disaster early warning system for the Indian Ocean and the South-East Asian region. The Declaration also supports the call for enhanced international cooperation and partnerships to build and manage effective regional early warning systems, public education and awareness and disaster management.

In the Mauritius Strategy for the further Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, adopted at the International Meeting, the small island developing States undertook to strengthen their respective national frameworks for more effective disaster management. In that regard, they committed themselves, with the necessary support of the international community, to strengthen the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction and related small island developing State regional mechanisms and facilities to improve national disaster mitigation, preparedness and early warning capacity, among other measures.

Almost three weeks after the tsunami in the Indian Ocean, people are still suffering as a result of its devastating effect. Humanitarian assistance is making a difference on the ground, but the fear of further suffering resulting from the spread of disease and epidemics cannot be overlooked. The international community must therefore stay the course and redouble its efforts in order to focus on the medium- and long-term reconstruction of those countries struck by the tsunami. Mauritius, for it part, has, within its modest means, supported the relief effort for the victims of the tsunami by making a token contribution.

Finally, my delegation fully welcomes the decision of the World Conference on Disaster Reduction, meeting in Kobe this week, to discuss the issue of regional and early warning systems as part of its agenda. Let us hope that the Kobe meeting takes concrete and action-oriented decisions which will help all countries, big and small, face such disasters with the least possible damage and destruction.

Mr. Le Luong Minh (Viet Nam): At the outset, on behalf of the delegation of Viet Nam, I wish to express to you, Mr. President, and to your staff our great appreciation for your swiftness in reconvening this session of the General Assembly.

As a member State of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which initiated the request to reconvene this session, Viet Nam fully aligns itself with the statement made earlier by the representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic on behalf of ASEAN. We hope that the draft resolution introduced by ASEAN and co-sponsored by a large number of countries will be adopted by consensus, thus reflecting the solidarity of the international community and its resolve to overcome the consequences of a disaster of a magnitude beyond our imagination.

From this podium, on behalf of the Government and the people of Viet Nam, I wish once again to express to the Governments, the people and the families of the victims in all affected countries our most profound sympathy and our sincerest feelings of solidarity. With more than 160,000 people losing their lives, tens of thousands still missing and millions

displaced in a matter of minutes, the damage caused by the tsunami is unprecedented. For those who have died, we can only wish peace to their souls. The most important task of the international community now is to help restore normalcy to the lives of the affected people.

In that connection, we are pleased to note that the response of the international community has also been unprecedented in terms of its swiftness and scale. Billions of dollars have been committed for assistance to the affected communities. Numerous humanitarian activities are taking place on the ground. Major steps have been taken by the international community in seeking to work together not only to overcome the consequences of the tsunami, but also to prevent further catastrophes.

Those steps include the special ASEAN leaders' meeting on 6 January in Jakarta, which adopted a declaration setting forth a set of actions to be implemented, covering various areas from emergency relief to rehabilitation, reconstruction and prevention; the Ministerial-level Meeting on Humanitarian Assistance to Tsunami-Affected Communities, held in Geneva on 11 January; the Secretary-General's launching of the Indian Ocean earthquake-tsunami 2005 flash appeal and his appointment of a special coordinator to coordinate international emergency relief operations in support of national emergency programmes of countries affected by the tsunami and covered by his flash appeal; and the World Conference on Disaster Reduction in Kobe, Japan, which, as we are meeting here today, is discussing, inter alia, the establishment of regional mechanisms for the surveillance, prevention and assessment of severe natural disasters. Viet Nam welcomes and supports those timely measures and looks forward to contributing to their implementation.

Immediately after learning of the losses and damage caused by the tsunami, the Vietnamese Government, in a gesture of sincere sympathy and solidarity, decided to donate approximately half a million dollars to help the victims in the most seriously affected countries. Vietnamese private citizens and social organizations have been actively responding to the appeals of the Vietnamese Government and of the Red Cross Society of Viet Nam to make financial and in-kind donations. According to incomplete statistics, approximately 2.5 billion Vietnamese dong — nearly $200,000 — have been raised to date, and the campaign is continuing.

Let me conclude by assuring members that at this difficult moment the Vietnamese Government and people will continue to join hands with the international community in concerted efforts to overcome the challenges ahead of us.

Mr. Dajer (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation associates itself with the statement made by the representative of Honduras on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States. On behalf of the Government of Colombia, we want to emphasize our most heartfelt condolences to all the States and victims affected by the tragedy that occurred on 26 December 2004.

The contributions and pledges made demonstrate the commitment of States, the international community and men and women throughout the world to overcome this catastrophe. My delegation welcomes the statement by the Secretary-General to the Assembly yesterday, in which he expressed his concern that the attention of the Organization and the international community be kept focused on this issue for the long term.

It is important that the United Nations system work with States to strengthen early warning mechanisms and to consider new forms of prevention. That would give States a greater capacity to respond to possible future tragedies. The prevention and management of tragedies such as the one that occurred on 26 December — which claimed more than 160,000 victims — deserve full attention, such as that given by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. This human tragedy challenges the United Nations to focus its coordinating efforts on humanitarian assistance in the event of natural disasters and to improve its response capacity.

We believe that the effective, efficient, timely and transparent management of human, material and economic resources will ensure that our assistance attains its objectives.

Mr. Khalid (Pakistan): The delegation of Pakistan associates itself with the previous speakers in expressing our deepest condolences and solidarity with regard to the victims of the tsunami disaster in the affected countries. The people of Pakistan are shocked and saddened by this natural calamity, and it is our

utmost desire to contribute in whatever way we can to restore normalcy in the areas struck by the calamity.

Being a neighbour in the region, Pakistan was among the first to respond to the human suffering following the catastrophic earthquake in the Indian Ocean. The Prime Minister of Pakistan, His Excellency Mr. Shaukat Aziz, approved an amount of at least $50 million for the people affected by the tsunami. The Minister of State for Foreign Affairs immediately visited Sri Lanka and Indonesia to express our solidarity with those countries. Pakistan has sent 12 relief sorties of C-130 aircraft to Sri Lanka and Indonesia, and the Pakistan navy has dispatched three helicopters, an expeditionary force, a medical team and engineering support equipment to those countries. Two Pakistan naval ships that were available in the tsunami-hit region of the Maldives participated in the relief and rescue operations for six days. Relief goods were distributed by helicopter, and 367 persons from 21 countries were evacuated.

In addition, the President of Pakistan has set up the President's Relief Fund for Tsunami Victims. The newspapers and electronic media have been mobilized for this purpose, and people from all walks of life are generously contributing to the Fund.

Edhi Foundation, a major Pakistani charitable organization, has dispatched relief goods worth 20 million rupees to Sri Lanka. The Church World Service of Pakistan has also sent donations, while the private TV channels have run telethon broadcasts to raise funds.

We are in favour of establishing regional early warning mechanisms to prevent such disasters. The Prime Minister, in his capacity as Chairman of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, has called for evolving a mechanism for an Asia-wide early warning and disaster response regime.

Pakistan is gratified that the international community has responded promptly and generously to help the victims of this disaster of unprecedented proportions. We appreciate the efforts of the United Nations in coordination and facilitating the global relief work. Pakistan will continue to support international efforts which bring quick succour to the affected people and hasten the process of reconstruction and rehabilitation in the countries hit by the tsunami.

Mr. Al-Ourabi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): My delegation welcomes this meeting of the resumed fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly on the strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance.

This meeting is being held in the wake of the tragedy that affected the countries of South-East Asia following the tsunami and the earthquake that shook the coastal countries. Kuwait would like to extend its condolences to those countries, which have suffered such a great loss of human life and economic losses on an unprecedented scale. We express our solidarity with those States and our determination to help to alleviate their sufferings directly or through international agencies.

In that connection, we welcome the unity of the international community, as manifested in this determination to lend economic assistance and emergency aid to alleviate the sufferings of the countries of South-East Asia and the Indian Ocean. We would like to commend the role played by the United Nations and its specialized agencies in coordinating and providing humanitarian assistance.

Kuwait deems it imperative that humanitarian assistance be provided to those States stricken by the tsunami and stresses the importance of coordinating humanitarian aid and economic assistance. That is why Kuwait responded promptly by contributing to alleviate the effects of the disaster. Kuwait believes that assistance must be well coordinated in order to help ease the suffering of the affected countries.

The Council of Ministers adopted a series of resolutions beginning on 26 December allocating $2 million to helping the countries of South-East Asia to overcome the crisis. It instructed the Committee of the Red Crescent in Kuwait to provide assistance of various kinds to the peoples affected. On 2 January, the Council decided to allocate a further $8 million. On 9 January, the Council of Ministers agreed that overall Kuwaiti humanitarian assistance to the States affected would total $100 million, broken down as follows.

First, $30 million was allocated to emergency assistance, humanitarian and logistical, and the Committee of the Red Crescent decided to coordinate such assistance with the international agencies working in that area. Secondly, the Kuwait Fund for Arabic

Economic Development has decided to give $70 million.

The Government of Kuwait also decided to entrust the various authorities involved with the task of cooperating with civil and charitable associations in conducting a campaign among the people, and, as a result, more than $12 million was presented on behalf of his Royal Highness and of the President of the Council of ministers.

The scope of the natural disasters that we have witnessed in recent years, and the loss of human life and damage to economic and social infrastructures, especially in developing countries, requires that the international community strengthen its coordination and intensify its spirit of solidarity in order to overcome these crises, or at least mitigate their effects.

Here, we would like to underscore the need to establish an infrastructure that would allow for the provision of such assistance. We would ask the developed countries to help the developing countries to set up such infrastructure by lending the necessary technical assistance.

In conclusion, we hope that this humanitarian assistance will continue in future in order to help the stricken countries, and that the international community and the United Nations, along with international agencies, will continue their efforts to meet the short- and long-term humanitarian and development needs of the countries stricken, with the goal of alleviating the devastating effects of these disasters, be it in the economic, environmental or other sphere.

We hope that the financial commitments made by the donor countries will allow us to overcome this crisis, and that those commitments will not come at the expense of official development assistance. Kuwait fully supports the draft resolution that has been submitted and that we have added our name to the list of sponsors.

Mr. Menon (Singapore): Mr. President, at the outset, I would like to thank you for having convened this resumed session of the fifty-ninth General Assembly. In associating myself with the statement made by the Permanent Representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, delivered on behalf of the members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and sponsors of the resolution, I would like also to join other speakers in extending my profound condolences to the countries which were hit by the earthquake and tsunami on 26 December last and to the millions of people from many countries and all five continents who have been affected in one way or another by this sudden tragedy.

It is indeed a tragedy, not only in terms of the disturbing statistics involved, but in terms of the lives torn asunder, the communities destroyed, the hopes and dreams extinguished, and the suffering and sorrows left behind. While Singapore itself was unaffected by the tsunamis, some Singaporeans lost their lives, while others are still missing. On Sunday, 9 January, an inter-faith memorial service was held in Singapore in remembrance of all of the victims of this great calamity.

The world has responded most admirably to this tragedy. Countries big and small have pledged generous sums of aid and also valuable help in kind. Contributions have come not only from countries, but also from many companies and private individuals who felt that they simply had to do something. In that regard, we commend the Secretary-General and Jan Egeland for their outstanding leadership during this crisis, and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the various United Nations agencies for responding swiftly and dealing effectively with the massive problems on the ground in all the affected countries.

Singapore is a small country whose contributions can only be a trickle in the ocean of assistance needed from the international community to help the affected countries. But geographic proximity to many of the affected countries, together with our well-developed communications and logistics links, as well as our status as a medical hub in the region, made it possible for us to respond speedily to the plight of many of the affected countries. Hence, our relief efforts reached our affected neighbours quickly, when they were most needed. In that regard, we deployed most of our available and relevant civil defence capabilities and military heavy-lift assets, including helicopters and landing ships, as well as cargo planes, to help create access to various communities that had been ravaged and cut off by the disaster and to provide those communities with fresh water, food, medicines, shelter and other basic needs. We also facilitated the relief operations of international and non-governmental organizations and other Governments by, inter alia,

making available our air and naval bases on a pro bono basis as staging areas for their operations.

At the same time, we have witnessed an outpouring of care and support, with individuals, private companies and hospitals in Singapore sending medical and technical relief teams to the affected countries and contributing much-needed supplies and equipment, including power generators and water treatment plants. Singaporeans and others living in Singapore have also donated over $20 million so far to help tsunami victims and families.

One of the key challenges facing the international community is effectively to deal with the medium- and long-term needs of the countries affected by the catastrophe. In adopting the Jakarta Declaration on 6 January 2005, the leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and other participating countries, as well as of international organizations, clearly acknowledged that helping the affected would entail efforts in emergency relief, rehabilitation and construction that may take five to ten years with resources that cannot be borne by any individual country. There is therefore a fundamental need for the United Nations and the global community to respond collectively to restore normalcy and to help rebuild the affected countries. Countries need to house and shelter their homeless, build schools and clinics, restart local economies and rebuild shattered communities.

Completing those tasks will take several years. Singapore is convinced that the only way that this can be achieved is through a sustained engagement of the international community in the medium- to long-term reconstruction of the affected countries. We were therefore heartened to hear the Secretary-General's statement yesterday that he would, by the end of the week, be responding to the call of the leaders who met in Jakarta by appointing a special representative. In our view, the special representative will play a crucial role in sustaining international attention and political will for the long-term effort. Past tragedies have shown that the world's attention span is, unfortunately, relatively short.

It is also crucial that the world find ways to mitigate the risk of disasters caused by tsunamis. The forces of nature can be benign, but at the same time destructive, unforgiving and unpredictable. There is an urgent need to put in place an international early warning system for tsunamis in the Indian Ocean. While we can, in time, rebuild what we have lost, we should take the appropriate steps to prevent a similar disaster from happening again.

We are all in this for the long haul. In solidarity with other affected countries, we will do our part in the international efforts towards rehabilitation and reconstruction. We stand ready to maintain our close cooperation with the United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross, other international organizations and institutions and the international community at large to assist affected countries. We have similarly worked with many delegations in preparing the draft resolution before us, entitled "Strengthening emergency relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and prevention in the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster," which we are confident this body will adopt by consensus, thereby signalling our strong and continued commitment to helping the countries and peoples affected by that terrible tragedy.

Mr. Talbot (Guyana): My delegation takes this opportunity to extend condolences on behalf of the Government and people of Guyana to the countries in Asia and Africa affected by the tsunami disaster of 26 December and to the countries of other regions whose nationals perished in the tsunami tide.

The Government and, indeed, the people of my country were profoundly touched by the unprecedented scale of the disaster — the catastrophic loss of human life, amounting to over 170,000 persons to date, and the magnitude of displacement, devastation and dislocation. Millions of people — a large number of them children — are now displaced or homeless.

At the same time, we are heartened by the overwhelming international response to the tragedy. We commend the Secretary-General and his team for the pivotal role being played by the United Nations system in that effort. We are grateful to the Governments and people of many countries that have pledged and are providing generous support.

My own country, within its modest means, has joined the global response. On 6 January, the President of Guyana, Mr. Bharrat Jagdeo, presented a contribution of $50,000 to the United Nations Children's Fund representative in Guyana for that purpose. The contribution of the Government has been exceeded by the generosity of the Guyanese people, who — facilitated by private-sector and social

organizations within our country — have to date mobilized more than $100,000 for the relief effort.

Guyana continues to stand in solidarity with the Governments and peoples of the affected countries in their efforts to provide relief and, in the long haul, to ensure recovery and reconstruction, and trusts that the international community's response will indeed endure over the long term.

Natural disasters have grown in scale and intensity in recent years, and 2004 was especially noteworthy in that regard. The tsunami in Asia was preceded by devastating hurricanes and tornadoes in the Caribbean and North America, and destructive phenomena in other parts of the world. Even as I speak, my own country, Guyana, a low-lying coastal State, is experiencing the worst floods to have hit our country in over 100 years. That has led my Government to declare three of the 10 administrative regions of Guyana, including our nation's capital, as disaster areas. Those areas are home to over 60 per cent of our population.

Our current experience serves only to further cement the bonds of empathy and solidarity with the countries and peoples affected. Guyana is therefore pleased to lend its full support to draft resolution A/59/L.58 and to join as a co-sponsor.

Mr. Al-Haiky (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): We are meeting today less than a month after one of the most tragic natural disasters that we have ever witnessed. We are deeply distressed by the tremendous damage wrought in certain countries of the Indian Ocean region by the destructive underwater earthquake and the giant tsunamis that it generated, killing vast numbers of people. We extend our condolences to the Governments of the countries and the families of the victims, and we express our sympathy and solidarity with the survivors of the disaster.

Such natural disasters occur suddenly, without warning. Thus the international community needs to react immediately to bring relief and assistance to the victims and to ensure that the effects of such calamities can be contained in order to prevent disease and hunger from spreading. Experts from the World Health Organization and other agencies responded quickly and informed the international community that the number of victims of disease and hunger could exceed the number of victims of the tsunami itself.

Thus, an immediate response is required. His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, the Emir of Qatar, has decided to provide the maximum assistance to the victims. Qatar was among the first countries to provide assistance. Thus far, some $25 million in assistance, including food aid, medicine and other products have been transported aboard Qatari aircraft to the affected countries. The immediate relief provided by the State of Qatar reflects the spirit of solidarity and fraternity that binds us with the peoples of the stricken countries. It is also the natural result of the State policies pursued by His Highness the Emir of Qatar, which stress the importance of providing assistance to developing countries that need it urgently in the event of natural disasters such as those experienced recently.

We are meeting here today to discuss ways and means of mitigating to the greatest extent possible the impact of the substantial damage suffered by the affected countries. We cannot remain idle, waiting for similar disasters to happen. We must as far as possible strive to limit the impact of such disasters in the future because it would be terrible if a similar natural disaster again caused such a loss of human lives, when we possess the technology, such as early warning systems, to counter it. We support international efforts to establish an early warning system, such as that which already exists in the Pacific Ocean, for the Indian Ocean and other regions that could face a disaster of this kind. The proposal before us, which my country sponsors, forms a good basis for coping with such catastrophes.

We believe that the material support and the human solidarity shown by many countries around the world is very encouraging, and we commend and welcome it. At the same time, we need to respect our commitments. We should not simply make pledges and promises. We must truly come to the assistance of the countries in need. That is the least that we can do when natural disasters occur.

Mr. Guterres (Timor-Leste): We welcome the convening of this meeting at the fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly to discuss issues related to the tsunami disaster that occurred in the Indian Ocean on 26 December 2004.

We felt shock when television screens showed the images of the tragic deaths, the destruction and the suffering of our fellow human beings in the devastated

areas, reaching from the Asian to the African shores of the Indian Ocean. That unprecedented natural disaster affected millions of lives in many countries. The psychological, environmental and socio-economic problems it created will have long-term effects.

The solidarity and the humanity manifested by the international community, the United Nations, Governments, peoples and business, as well as by humanitarian institutions from the North, South, East and West, are also unprecedented. It is morally rewarding to witness the strong bond of solidarity between peoples and countries and to see warships, helicopters and soldiers from various countries using their strength to save lives and to bring food and shelter to families in those devastated regions.

The Government of Timor-Leste has decided to make a modest financial contribution. We believe that it is our moral duty to express our solidarity with the peoples and the countries affected by the tsunami. The President of my country, Mr. Xanana Gusmão, is leading an ongoing public campaign to gather more financial support. We have also joined the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in sponsoring the draft resolution before the Assembly.

Today is a great opportunity for the United Nations, Governments and scientific institutions to find solutions that can help mitigate the effects of natural disasters. We hope that the meeting in Kobe, Japan, will produce strong recommendations in that direction. We support the establishment of an early warning system, as recommended by the ASEAN countries.

Finally, we would like to reiterate our condolences to the peoples, the countries and the families affected by the disaster in the Indian Ocean area and on other continents.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on the Observer of the Holy See.

Archbishop Migliore (Holy See): My delegation would like to express once again its deepest condolences to the concerned countries and add its support for those measures intended to strengthen emergency relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction, as well as prevention, in the wake of the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster.

Since the very start of the emergency, His Holiness Pope John Paul II has expressed his deepest sympathy and has committed the agencies of the Catholic Church to act in a genuine gesture of solidarity with all peoples, without exception, in each nation touched by that enormous tragedy.

Our institutions and the papal representatives present in the affected countries went into action immediately. First, they provided food and clothing and sheltered the affected populations. Tragically, it has become clear that the most affected group has been young children, of whom at least 50,000 were swept away; but there are also tens of thousands left orphaned. For those reasons, we are placing special emphasis on ways to bring help to surviving children in the worst affected zones.

In cooperation with the Pontifical Council Cor Unum, a very long list of Catholic agencies is already using funds from throughout the world, amounting to nearly $500 million, some of which is going into emergency aid and the rest into longer-term projects through our local networks. Non-governmental organizations and other faith-based organizations in the field now need to be allowed to work directly with the populace, while the aid from multilateral funds should be distributed equitably among the affected regions without political, ethnic or religious bias and in dialogue with the various stakeholders.

The extraordinary impact of the power of nature within a radius of thousands of miles has elicited an equally extraordinary response from the peoples and Governments of the whole world in an outpouring of sympathy and solidarity rarely seen in recent times. Such a swift and practical expression of global solidarity is surely a sign of the fundamental decency of the peoples of the world. It is clear that, regardless of the things that separate us, there exists a deep sense of our shared humanity and fragility in the face of such terrible events.

It seems clear that this is an emergency whose aftermath is going to last through the medium and long term, and so it is to be hoped that the solidarity of private citizens and Governments alike will not die down once the world recovers from the initial shock of the calamity.

In addition to strengthening emergency relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction, as mentioned in the draft resolution that is before the Assembly, the world's nations should seize this opportunity and the goodwill generated by the world's peoples so as to further important humanitarian goals on the broader

agenda at this time. There is now a sense of humanitarian momentum, and we should not let it slip by. We owe it to all concerned to redouble efforts aimed at bringing a rapid and just political solution in those areas still suffering from conflict.

Moreover, some have expressed concern that the tsunami disaster might distract people's attention from other issues, especially the concerns of the small island developing States and this year's review of the Millennium Development Goals. It is well known that 25 million people throughout the world still suffer bitterly due to largely man-made wars, disasters and mismanagement.

My delegation earnestly hopes, therefore, that this year solidarity will be the hallmark of the political agenda so as to help all nations refocus on ways to achieve the development goals agreed upon at the start of this millennium.

Finally, my delegation takes this opportunity to congratulate all those who have been so rapid and generous in their response to the tsunami disaster, including the Secretary-General and the members of the agencies of the Organization. It now falls to the United Nations to become once again a great driving force, dedicated, courageous and humanitarian, as it is in the best moments of its history.

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with General Assembly resolution 49/2 of 19 October 1994, I now call on the observer for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

Mr. Gospodinov (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies): In this very, very special debate, I am probably the last speaker today representing an organization that was among the first to react. Let me also express our deep condolences to all those who suffered and who lost their loved ones.

It has been three long, nightmarish weeks for those who survived the waves yet lost so much and so many. We have all committed our hearts and minds to alleviating the effects of that disaster, and, as we look ahead, we hope that the worst is behind us.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) welcomes the decision of the General Assembly to hold a special debate on the urgency of strengthening emergency relief. It provides us with an important opportunity to stress the priority that must be given to disaster preparedness and disaster response, together.

It is well known that the IFRC, working with its network in every country, is at the forefront of providing emergency relief on the ground following natural disasters. The point was stressed on 11 January by Mr. Jan Egeland, who spoke of "the crucial role of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies as the first line of defence against suffering and disease" in disaster situations.

The Asian earthquakes and tsunamis of 26 December 2004 were followed by tremendous support, at an unprecedented level, from private citizens and the corporate sector. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all Governments and all missions in New York, which gave us such strong support. Their contribution acknowledges the immediate response of our volunteers and trained staff in the countries directly affected following the disaster. Our volunteers were on the spot and providing rescue and relief services before news of the catastrophe had even reached the outside world.

Our assessments enabled our headquarters in Geneva to issue the first preliminary appeal for support just eight hours after the disaster struck. We are now at work in all 12 countries that were directly touched, providing support to help reunite families and assisting the tremendous number of people who have lost relatives and friends.

Details of our work can be found on our web site, so I will spare members the statistics relating to what we do. Our people can be seen on the television screen every day. I will simply note that it shows that thousands of Red Cross/Red Crescent volunteers, staff and emergency response units are achieving a great deal. To provide just one example, this is the largest-ever water and sanitation deployment in our history.

There has been interest from around the world in our work. This is in recognition of the fact that we are in a unique position. We are the only international organization with a grassroots presence in virtually every country and community in the world. We are also a federation of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, which are auxiliaries to the public authorities in their respective countries, which means they have special legal status. At the outset, the Federation and its member national societies, and our colleagues from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC),

quickly reached agreement on our cooperation in the region. As rescue and rehabilitation efforts continued, we also established immediately close cooperation and coordination with all local authorities and our colleagues from the United Nations system, especially the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

Let me say a few words on the message we are constantly sending, from Jakarta to Geneva and now Kobe. It is a simple message. Emergency relief must be built into national programmes of preparedness and risk reduction. Such programmes should be designed and implemented through a national body, which includes the local Red Cross or Red Crescent Society. That was agreed upon by all member States of the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in December 2003 in Geneva.

Emergency relief cannot be supplied by the international community alone. The first line of defence, as Mr. Egeland has stated, is provided by the communities themselves.

The best possible systems must be in place to provide warnings of impending disaster. Yet even the best systems cannot work without the involvement of local communities and their volunteers. Experience shows that a well-trained and well-prepared volunteer base is essential to warning people and then saving lives. That is exactly what our experience from Bam, Iran, shows.

Governments should bring their relevant laws and rules into harmony with all international instruments and the necessities imposed by disaster situations. The IFRC's international disaster response laws, rules and principles programme is all the more relevant to emergency relief in the context of today's setting — 12 countries directly affected, and a worldwide outpouring of generosity.

My delegation has been privileged to offer advice to the sponsors of the draft resolution now under discussion. The draft resolution makes important references to the need for effective risk reduction and preparedness programmes. It also notes that focus must remain steady to ensure that medium- and long-term rehabilitation and reconstruction will be carried out. Now, however, we hope to see strong support in the implementation phase of this resolution, with a focus on capacity building, especially at the community level.

We will no doubt return to the issues raised in this debate many times in the months and years ahead. It is, however, important that we do not lose sight of other priorities, which demand increasingly urgent attention from the international community. I will not detail them now, except to say that we noted with care that nearly all who spoke during the ministerial conference in Geneva on 11 January said that their pledges for the tsunami-affected countries were additional to the assistance funds that they were already providing for other humanitarian purposes.

We hope that this remains true. Despite progress towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, a great deal must still be done to address the poverty and despair that deprive so many people of basic human needs and dignity.

The price we all have paid in this disaster, and the tragedy of those who perished and of those who have survived mandate that we do much more, faster and better than ever before, if we are to avoid another shock of that magnitude in the future. I sincerely hope that the destructive power witnessed in the Bay of Bengal will lead to a new culture of the power of prevention.

The President (*spoke in French*): We have heard the last speaker in the debate on agenda item 39. Now we shall proceed to consider draft resolution A/59/L.58, as orally revised. I give the floor to the representative of the Secretariat.

Mr. Botnaru (General Assembly Affairs Branch): I would like to inform representatives that, in connection with draft resolution A/59/L.58, "Strengthening emergency relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and prevention in the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster", I wish to put on record the following statement on financial implications, on behalf of the Secretary-General:

> "By operative paragraph 6 of the draft resolution, the General Assembly would request the Secretary-General to appoint a special representative in order to, inter alia, sustain the political will of the international community to support medium- and long-term rehabilitation, reconstruction and risk reduction efforts led by the Governments of affected countries at all levels.

"It is envisaged that the special representative would continue to support the ongoing emergency operation, including the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the areas affected by the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster. The resources that would be required in connection with the appointment of the special representative would be financed exclusively from extra-budgetary resources.

"Therefore, should the General Assembly adopt draft resolution A/59/L.58, there would be no financial implications for the regular budget for the biennium 2004-2005."

The President (*spoke in French*): The General Assembly will take a decision on draft resolution A/59/L.58, entitled "Strengthening emergency relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and prevention in the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster", as orally revised.

Before we take a decision on the draft resolution I would like to inform the Assembly that the following countries have become sponsors of document A/59/L.58 since its issuance: Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Bulgaria, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chile, Croatia, Cuba, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Granada, Guinea, Guyana, Iceland, India, Israel, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Lesotho, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Madagascar, Mexico, Mozambique, Namibia, Nauru, Nepal, Nigeria, Qatar, the Republic of Moldova, Samoa, Slovakia, Spain, Sudan, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, Ukraine, the United States of America and Vanuatu.

May I take it that the General Assembly wishes to adopt draft resolution A/59/L.58, as orally revised?

The draft resolution, as orally revised, was adopted (resolution 59/279).

The President (*spoke in French*): The General Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 39.

Before I adjourn the meeting, I should like once again, on behalf of the General Assembly, to convey our most sincere condolences to the peoples and countries affected by this earthquake and tsunami of unprecedented proportions. Also, on the Assembly's behalf, I wish to pay tribute to the extraordinary efforts made by the international community to come to the assistance and succour of the populations and countries hit by the earthquake and tsunami. Lastly, I wish, also on the Assembly's behalf, to make a strong appeal for donor countries to fulfil the pledges of assistance that they have made.

The meeting rose at 11.20 a.m.

United Nations A/59/PV.80

General Assembly
Fifty-ninth session

Official Records

80th plenary meeting
Thursday, 20 January 2005, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Ping ..... (Gabon)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 8 (*continued*)

Organization of work, adoption of the agenda and allocation of items: request for the reopening of the consideration of agenda item 18

The President (*spoke in French*): I invite the attention of the General Assembly to documents A/59/666 and A/59/676, circulated under agenda item 18, "Election of judges of the International Tribunal for the Prosecution of Persons Responsible for Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law Committed in the Territory of the Former Yugoslavia since 1991".

Members will recall that the General Assembly concluded consideration of agenda item 18 at its 57th plenary meeting, held on 18 and 19 November 2004.

In order to enable the General Assembly to consider the letter from the Secretary-General dated 6 January 2005 and the letter from the President of the Security Council dated 18 January 2005, both addressed to the President of the General Assembly, contained in documents A/59/666 and A/59/676 respectively, it will be necessary to reopen consideration of agenda item 18.

May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to reopen consideration of agenda item 18?

It was so decided.

The President (*spoke in French*): In order for the General Assembly to take action expeditiously on documents A/59/666 and A/59/676, may I take it also that the Assembly agrees to proceed immediately to the consideration of agenda item 18?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 18 (*continued*)

Election of judges of the International Tribunal for the Prosecution of Persons Responsible for Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law Committed in the Territory of the Former Yugoslavia since 1991

Letter dated 6 January 2005 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the General Assembly (A/59/666)

Letter dated 18 January 2005 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the President of the General Assembly (A/59/676)

The President (*spoke in French*): In his letter, the Secretary-General informs the Assembly that the term of office of the members of the current pool of ad litem judges of the Tribunal will come to an end on 11 June 2005 and that they are not eligible for re-election. He further advises that, of the nine ad litem judges who are currently serving in the Tribunal, two are adjudicating in a case that was due to finish within the next two weeks. The case is now finished. The

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other seven, however, are adjudicating in cases which are anticipated to continue beyond 11 June 2005.

Ad litem judges Brydensholt and Eser are currently adjudicating in the Orić case. It is anticipated that the hearings in that case will be completed and judgement handed down in November 2005.

Ad litem judges Rasoazanany and Swart are adjudicating in the trial of the Hadžihasanović case. It is anticipated that hearings in that case will be completed and judgement handed down in September 2005.

Ad litem judges Thelin and Van den Wyngaert are adjudicating in the trial of the Limaj case. It is anticipated that hearings in that case will be completed and judgement handed down in November 2005.

Ad litem judge Canivell is adjudicating in the trial of the Krajišnik case. It is anticipated that hearings in the case should be completed and judgement handed down in April 2006.

In the absence of any provision in the statute of the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia whereby judges continue to discharge their duties until they are replaced and, thereafter, until they finish any cases that they may have begun, the approval of the Security Council, as the parent organ of the Tribunal, and of the General Assembly, as the organ that elects its judges, would be needed in order to permit the seven ad litem judges concerned to continue to serve in the Tribunal beyond 11 June 2005 and to finish the cases in which they are currently adjudicating, notwithstanding the expiry of their terms of office.

The Secretary-General further informs the Assembly that he has received requests from Judge Meron, President of the International Tribunal, to appoint two additional members from the current pool of ad litem judges to serve in the Tribunal for trying cases. In both cases, it is anticipated that the trials concerned will continue beyond 11 June 2005.

The Secretary-General was requested to appoint ad litem judge Szénási to serve in the Tribunal for the trial of the Halilović case. The trial is ready to commence on 24 January 2005 and judgement would be handed down in October 2005.

The Secretary-General has also been requested to appoint ad litem judge Hanoteau to serve in the Tribunal for the trial of the Krajišnik case in time for hearings to be able to resume as early as 14 February 2005. It is anticipated that proceedings in the case would be completed and judgement handed down in April 2006.

The Secretary-General considers that it would be highly desirable for the Security Council and the General Assembly first to agree that the judges concerned, if appointed, may continue to serve in the Tribunal for the trials of the two cases in question and to finish those trials, notwithstanding the expiry of their term of office.

In the letter addressed to the President of the General Assembly contained in document A/59/676, the President of the Security Council draws attention to Council resolution 1581 (2005) of 18 January 2005, whereby the Council, inter alia:

> "1. Decides, in response to the request by the Secretary-General, that:
>
> "(a) Judge Rasoazanany and Judge Swart, once replaced as ad litem judges of the International Tribunal, finish the Hadžihasanović case, which they have begun before expiry of their term of office;
>
> "(b) Judge Brydensholt and Judge Eser, once replaced as ad litem judges of the International Tribunal, finish the Orić case, which they have begun before expiry of their term of office;
>
> "(c) Judge Thelin and Judge Van den Wyngaert, once replaced as ad litem judges of the International Tribunal, finish the Limaj case, which they have begun before expiry of their term of office;
>
> "(d) Judge Canivell, once replaced as an ad litem judge of the International Tribunal, finish the Krajišnik case, which he has begun before expiry of his term of office;
>
> "(e) Judge Szénási, if appointed to serve in the International Tribunal for the trial of the Halilović case, proceed, once replaced as an ad litem judge of the International Tribunal, to finish that case, which he would have begun before expiry of his term of office;
>
> "(f) Judge Hanoteau, if appointed to serve in the International Tribunal for the trial of the Krajišnik case, proceed, once replaced as an ad litem judge of the International Tribunal, to finish that case, which he would have begun before expiry of his term of office;

"2. Takes note in this regard of the intention of the International Tribunal to finish the Hadžihasanović case before the end of September 2005, the Halilović case before the end of October 2005, the Orić and Limaj cases before the end of November 2005 and the Krajišnik case before the end of April 2006."

If there is no objection, I propose that the Assembly decide to endorse those recommendations of the Secretary-General that were endorsed by the Security Council in its resolution 1581 (2005) of 18 January 2005.

It was so decided.

The President (*spoke in French*): The General Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 18.

Agenda item 43

Follow-up to the outcome of the twenty-sixth special session: implementation of the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS

Draft decision (A/59/L.59)

The President (*spoke in French*): We shall now proceed to consider draft decision A/59/L.59.

The Assembly will now take a decision on draft decision A/59/L.59, entitled "Participation of civil society representatives in the high-level meeting to review the progress achieved in realizing commitments set out in the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS".

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft decision A/59/L 59?

The draft decision was adopted.

The President (*spoke in French*): For the sake of clarity, I should like to inform the Assembly that the decision that has just been adopted authorizes the 15 representatives of civil society to participate in the round table of the high-level meeting to review the progress achieved in realizing the commitments set out in the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS, pursuant to paragraph 3 (d) of resolution 58/313 of 1 July 2004.

The General Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 43.

The meeting rose at 10.25 a.m.

United Nations A/59/PV.81

General Assembly
Fifty-ninth session

Official Records

81st plenary meeting
Tuesday, 15 February 2005, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Ping ..... (Gabon)

The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Tribute to the memory of His Excellency Mr. Gnassingbé Eyadema, President of the Togolese Republic

Tribute to the memory of His Excellency Mr. Zurab Zhvania, Prime Minister of Georgia

Tribute to the memory of His Excellency Mr. Sami Kronfol, Permanent Representative of Lebanon

The President (*spoke in French*): This morning, it is our sad duty to pay tribute to the memory of the late President of the Togolese Republic, His Excellency Mr. Gnassingbé Eyadema, who passed away on Saturday, 5 February 2005.

On behalf of the General Assembly, I request the representative of Togo to convey our condolences to the Government and the people of the Togolese Republic and to the bereaved family of His Excellency Mr. Gnassingbé Eyadema.

I express my personal hope that that country, where the present situation is of concern, will again enjoy peace and calm within the framework of its own constitutional laws.

It is our sad duty also to pay tribute to the memory of the late Prime Minister of Georgia, His Excellency Mr. Zurab Zhvania, who passed away on Thursday, 3 February 2005.

On behalf of the General Assembly, I request the representative of Georgia to convey our condolences to the Government and the people of Georgia and to the bereaved family of His Excellency Mr. Zurab Zhvania.

Further, it is our sad duty to pay tribute to the memory of the late Permanent Representative of Lebanon, His Excellency Mr. Sami Kronfol, who passed away on Tuesday, 1 February 2005.

On behalf of the General Assembly, I request the representative of Lebanon to convey our condolences to the Government and the people of Lebanon and to the bereaved family of His Excellency Mr. Sami Kronfol. As members know, Lebanon has also just violently lost former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri.

I invite representatives to stand and observe a minute of silence in tribute to the memory of His Excellency Mr. Gnassingbé Eyadema, His Excellency Mr. Zurab Zhvania and His Excellency Mr. Sami Kronfol.

The members of the General Assembly observed a minute of silent prayer or meditation.

The President (*spoke in French*): I call now on the representative of Kenya, who will speak on behalf of the Group of African States.

Ms. Bahemuka (Kenya): I wish on behalf of the Group of African States to express our profound sadness following the death of the President of the Togolese Republic, His Excellency Mr. Gnassingbé Eyadema, on 5 February 2005. Allow me, on behalf of

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the Group, to convey our heartfelt condolences to the members of his family, to the people of Togo and to the friends of Togo on this immense loss. We share in their pain; we share in their sorrow.

President Eyadema will be greatly missed, not only by the people of Togo but also by those of the West African region and of the entire African continent. I pay tribute to his commitment to peace and stability in Togo, and especially to his very active role in conflict resolution in West Africa.

In memory of the late President Eyadema, the African Group appeals to the authorities in Togo to respect the legislation on succession in conformity with the constitution and to return the country to constitutional rule, in the interest of the Togolese people. We urge the people of Togo to exercise restraint and to organize elections without further delay. The African Group is convinced that the salvation of the country lies in respect for the constitution, the rule of law and free and fair elections.

I also take this opportunity to express the African Group's condolences following the accidental death of the Prime Minister of Georgia, His Excellency Mr. Zurab Zhvania. The late Prime Minister's death has robbed Georgia of a visionary leader who was the driving force behind the economic reforms which are under way in that country. I pay special tribute to his leadership and to his commitment to his people and to his country. We join the people of Georgia in mourning his death. He will be sorely missed by the people of Georgia.

The African Group expresses shock and dismay following the assassination of the former Lebanese Prime Minister, Mr. Rafik Hariri. We condemn the perpetrators of that heinous act. The assassination of that great man puts at risk the peace and stability that Lebanon has enjoyed for the past 15 years. We pay tribute to Mr. Hariri for his dedication, for his commitment and for his leadership role in that country's reconstruction in the 1990s.

Finally, I would like personally to pay tribute to a great friend and a dear colleague, the late Ambassador Sami Kronfol. Not only was he a great ambassador and a man of charisma and character, but he touched the lives of many in one way or another.

In tribute to the three men who have left us, we commit and rededicate ourselves to follow the good they have done. With respect to what has not been done, we look forward to all of us walking hand in hand to achieve their dreams.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on the representative of Bahrain, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Asian States.

Mr. Almansoor (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of the Group of Asian States, which I have the honour to chair this month, I would like to convey our most heartfelt condolences to the family and to the people on the much lamented death of the President of the Togolese Republic, Gnassingbé Eyadema, who passed away on 5 February 2005.

The death of President Eyadema is a great loss for the States of West Africa and the African continent. He was one of the oldest rulers of Africa, having led Togo since 1967. During his tenure he worked to promote Togo's relations with other African States and the rest of the world and spared no effort to serve his country and to strengthen its position among African nations. He devoted his efforts to strengthening relations with members of the international community. We sincerely hope that the Togolese will take every measure possible to preserve stability and security within their country. We call upon all parties in the country to continue the policy of dialogue and responsibility to promote the values of peace and solidarity among themselves.

I also have the honour to convey, on behalf of the Asian Group, my deepest condolences to the Government and people of Georgia on the sad and sudden death of Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania, who was only 41 years old. The sudden passing of the Prime Minister has caused all of us a deep sense of grief and sadness. Mr. Zhvania worked tirelessly for the progress of his country through the adoption of economic reforms to promote the role of Georgia and to strengthen its relations with the international community. Within a short period of flexible administration of Georgia's economy he managed to expand his country's relations with international financial institutions. The loss of Mr. Zhvania is a great loss for Georgia and the rest of the world.

I also wish to express the Asian Group's condolences to the family of the former Prime Minister of Lebanon, Mr. Rafik Hariri, and to the Government and people of Lebanon in this great loss, which has shocked us all. Prime Minister Hariri tried hard to

reconstruct modern Lebanon. He was a great nationalist and a good example to be followed. He was a formidable politician and a moderate politician, a friend of all. It is a great loss for Lebanon, the Arab nation and the whole world. May God bless his soul.

I also have the honour to convey, on behalf of the Asian Group, our deepest condolences on the passing of brother Ambassador Sami Kronfol, Permanent Representative of Lebanon to the United Nations, to the Government and people of Lebanon and to our brothers in the Permanent Mission of Lebanon to the United Nations on his much lamented death. We were all touched by his sudden passing away. He was a good friend to all of us. In the course of his work in the United Nations he forged many friendships. He was a brilliant diplomat, dedicated and talented, who served his country and its causes with the utmost dedication. The United Nations family has lost one of its most cherished diplomats, who will always be remembered for his friendly company. May the soul of Mr. Kronfol rest in peace.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on Mrs. Irena Zubčević, representative of Croatia, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Eastern European States.

Mrs. Zubčević (Croatia): On behalf of the Group of Eastern European States it is my solemn duty to express sincere sympathy upon the sad passing of the President of Togo, His Excellency Mr. Gnassingbé Eyadema; the Prime Minister of Georgia, His Excellency Mr. Zurab Zhvania; and the Permanent Representative of Lebanon to the United Nations, His Excellency Mr. Sami Kronfol.

With the sad demise of the President of Togo, Mr. Eyadema, Africa has lost its longest-ruling leader. We express our condolences to the Government and people of Togo, as well as to his family.

As a true Georgian patriot Mr. Zhvania was instrumental in enhancing the democratic development and progress of the Georgian people, and he dedicated his life to this cause. His legacy will remain a beacon for all people of good will.

Ambassador Kronfol was an experienced diplomat with extensive knowledge of multilateral and Arab affairs. His presence will be sorely missed by his colleagues in the United Nations.

On behalf of the Group of Eastern European States I respectfully request that sincere condolences be conveyed to the Governments and people of Georgia and of Lebanon, and also to the members of the bereaved families in this time of loss.

We also wish to extend our condolences to the family of the former Prime Minister of Lebanon, His Excellency Mr. Rafik Hariri.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Paraguay, to speak on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States.

Mr. Loizaga (Paraguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States, over which I have the honour to preside, may I express our sincerest condolences at the recent passing of the President of Togo, Mr. Gnassingbé Eyadema, and the Prime Minister of Georgia, Mr. Zurab Zhvania, and to the people of Togo and Georgia. Our condolences go also to their respective families, who in recent weeks suffered those tragic losses. We would like to pay a just tribute to these distinguished public figures, who gave their all to their respective countries.

On this day we also recall our former colleague, the Permanent Representative of Lebanon, Ambassador Sami Kronfol, who passed away recently. During his tenure, Ambassador Kronfol won the friendship, respect and admiration of his colleagues, representing his country and his Government effectively and with dedication and a sense of responsibility.

On behalf of our regional group, I extend our heartfelt condolences to the people and the Government of Lebanon, to the bereaved family and to the members of the Permanent Mission of Lebanon.

We would also like, on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States, to express our condolences to the bereaved family and to the people of Lebanon on the brutal assassination of the former Prime Minister of Lebanon, Mr. Rafik Hariri, and other civilians, victims of the irrational conduct of people who can only express themselves through violence. It is our hope that peace and harmony will very soon return to the people of Lebanon so that they can address the tragedy that has struck them once again.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, who will speak on

behalf of the Group of Western European and other States.

Mr. Thomson (United Kingdom): There are numerous deaths to mourn today. As you have noted, Mr. President, Lebanon has lost its former Prime Minister.

I speak on behalf of the Group of Western European and other States in expressing our concern at the death of President Eyadema of Togo. We extend our condolences to the family of President Eyadema and to the Togolese people.

All of us in the Group of Western European and other States were shocked at the news of the sudden death of the Prime Minister of Georgia, Mr. Zurab Zhvania. Our Group extends its condolences to the family of Mr. Zhvania and to the Georgian people, for whom his death is a terrible loss.

I would also like to extend the group's condolences following the passing of His Excellency Mr. Sami Kronfol, Permanent Representative of Lebanon, to the Lebanese Mission to the United Nations and to the family of Mr. Kronfol. The United Nations diplomatic community will sorely miss him.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Arab States.

Mr. Mekdad (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is my honour to address the General Assembly today on behalf of the Arab States members of the League of Arab States, and as Chairman of the Arab Group for the month of February.

It is my sad duty to convey to the Government and the people of Togo our most sincere condolences on the death of their leader, Mr. Gnassingbé Eyadema. The late President was one of the eminent world leaders who devote their lives to their people and to the achievement of the objectives of development and progress.

President Eyadema was one of the African leaders who made every effort to bring peace and progress to Africa and to develop relations between the countries of Africa and the entire world. We are convinced that the people of Togo will overcome this painful loss and continue the construction and development of Togo and that they will strengthen their role at the regional and international levels.

The death, in his prime, of the Prime Minister of Georgia was a huge loss to his people and to the international community. His death has left us with great sadness, as he worked tirelessly for the progress of his people and towards consolidating relations with the international community. In addition, he was able to strengthen the economic situation in Georgia. We express our profound condolences to his family and to the people of Georgia.

Lebanon has suffered a huge loss. A few days ago, terrorism, carried out by criminals, killed one of the symbols and leaders of Lebanon, former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. His cruel death is not only a loss for Lebanon, but also a huge loss for all Arab countries. His policies were aimed at consolidating relations between Lebanon and the other members of the Arab Group. That was among the essential causes to which he devoted his efforts throughout a life marked by great accomplishments, including ending the civil war in Lebanon and rebuilding the country. We shall all feel the loss, in particular, my country, which loved him and which had strong ties of cooperation with him. On behalf of the Arab Group, I express our most sincere condolences to Lebanon and its fraternal people, as well as to Mr. Hariri's family. We hope that our brethren in Lebanon will continue the progress for which he worked.

On behalf of the Arab Group, we also express our condolences upon the loss of the Permanent Representative of Lebanon, Mr. Sami Kronfol. We have all worked with Ambassador Kronfol, who represented his country in an outstanding manner and who defended its cause in the United Nations and elsewhere. We could all sense his profound commitment and the sincerity of his efforts in all his activities. His time at the United Nations was brief, but he left a profound imprint reflecting the capabilities of Lebanese diplomacy. He always defended his country, his region and the world. With the passing of Mr. Kronfol, our loss is enormous. We have lost his outstanding professional capacities. He was highly intellectual, and was an expert in history, philosophy and science. I wish everyone could have had the opportunity to know this man, and to know his heart and its riches. We express our sincere condolences to the Permanent Mission of Lebanon to the United Nations, to the Government of Lebanon and, above all, to Ambassador Kronfol's family. May God have mercy upon him.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Togo.

Mr. Menan (Togo) (*spoke in French*): It is with profound grief and great sorrow that we speak on behalf of the Government and the people of Togo during the General Assembly's tribute to the memory of President Gnassingbé Eyadema of Togo, Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania of Georgia and Ambassador Sami Kronfol of Lebanon, all of whom have left us.

First of all, we wish to express our heartfelt thanks to the President of the General Assembly, to the Secretary-General and to all Member States for their sincere expressions of condolence and their sympathy upon the cruel loss that struck the Togolese people with the passing of President Eyadema on 5 February 2005. Togo greatly appreciates the compassion shown by the international community.

As we all know, President Eyadema devoted his whole life to working tirelessly and relentlessly in the quest for peace, security and sustainable development. His many notable contributions to the restoration and promotion of peace wherever it was in danger — particularly in Africa — are well known. They proceeded from the late President's unfailing commitment to dialogue and consultation, which alone make it possible to resolve disputes — whatever they may be — in a sustainable manner.

A great architect of peace and dialogue, President Eyadema was also a fervent promoter of development: the best way to lift the peoples of our countries out of misery and poverty. Thus, he was at the forefront of the creation, in 1975, of the Economic Community of West African States, which — as the Assembly is aware — has set about in a remarkable way to resolve the crises and conflicts that unfortunately continue to shake the subregion.

In that context, President Eyadema appealed to the international community, at the Millennium Summit, held here in September 2000, to devote sustained attention to African States so that they could have the opportunity to make significant progress in the new global economy. Today, the initiatives that are materializing for the African continent — particularly the British initiative of a "Marshall Plan" for Africa; the establishment of an African peace force, which was proposed at the summit of the Organization of African Unity held in Tunis in 1994; and many others — can only serve to confirm the wisdom of the late President's views.

In conclusion, we should like to express once again our most heartfelt condolences and deep sympathy to the Governments and the peoples of Georgia and Lebanon, who, like Togo, have lost one of their illustrious sons. We also wish to pay tribute to the memory of the former Prime Minister of Lebanon, His Excellency Mr. Rafik Harıri, who was tragically assassinated yesterday.

May the eminent personalities whose memories we honour today rest in peace.

The President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to the representative of Georgia.

Mr. Kaladze (Georgia): On behalf of the Government of Georgia, I should like to join previous speakers in expressing our sincere sympathy upon the sad passing of His Excellency Mr. Gnassingbé Eyadema, President of Togo, and of His Excellency Mr. Sami Kronfol, Permanent Representative of Lebanon to the United Nations, and upon the shocking assassination of His Excellency Mr. Rafik Hariri, former Prime Minister of Lebanon. The sorrow of the peoples of Togo and Lebanon is very close to the hearts of the Georgian people today, and we fully share their grief.

Let me also express, on behalf of the Government and the people of Georgia, sincere gratitude for the condolences and sympathy offered in connection with the tragic death of His Excellency Mr. Zurab Zhvania, Prime Minister of Georgia. Mr. Zhvania was not just a Prime Minister, but also a highly capable and important politician who had contributed immensely to the democratic development of my country for more than a decade, since its recent independence. He was truly an architect of modern-day Georgia. Even more, his leadership and vision made all friends of Georgia hopeful for the country's future as a democratic and prosperous nation.

The loss of Mr. Zhvania is irreparable for Georgia; a leader of such calibre does not emerge every day. Nevertheless, we are determined to continue on the path outlined in his vision for a democratic Georgia in order to make Mr. Zhvania's ideals a reality. That will be the best possible tribute to the memory of an outstanding statesman.

The President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to the representative of Lebanon.

Mr. Assaf (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): In Lebanon today, we seem to be in a constant state of sorrow: we have lost the former Prime Minister of our country, Mr. Rafik Hariri, who was tragically assassinated yesterday. Lebanon, the Arab nation and the entire world have lost a man who had a great future. In an interview broadcast on CNN yesterday, we heard him say he was a young man of only 60.

I should like to express my thanks and appreciation to the General Assembly for the expressions of solidarity and condolence following the death of Ambassador Sami Kronfol, Permanent Representative of Lebanon. I should also like to thank all those who have come to the Permanent Mission of Lebanon to sign the book of condolences, led by Mr. Jean Ping, President of the General Assembly, and Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

On this occasion, an old saying comes to mind: "Health is the crown on the heads of the healthy that is seen only by the sick". Although we would all like to enjoy good health, we cannot fail to support the specialized agencies of the United Nations — particularly the World Health Organization — which have tirelessly sought remedies for the incurable diseases that continue to kill human beings, depriving them of their potential.

Agenda item 113 (*continued*)

Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations (A/59/668/Add.1 to Add.6)

The President (*spoke in French*): Next, I would like to invite the attention of the General Assembly to documents A/59/668/Add.1 to Add.6, in which the Secretary-General informs the President of the General Assembly that, since the issuance of his communication contained in document A/59/668, Benin, the Congo, Paraguay, Suriname, Ukraine and Uruguay have made the necessary payments to reduce their arrears below the amount specified in Article 19 of the Charter.

May I take it that the General Assembly duly takes note of the information contained in those documents?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 15 (*continued*)

Elections to fill vacancies in principal organs

(c) Election of a member of the International Court of Justice

Note by the Secretary-General (A/59/682)

Memorandum by the Secretary-General (A/59/683)

Curriculum vitae (A/59/684)

The President (*spoke in French*): The General Assembly will proceed to the election of a member of the International Court of Justice for the unexpired term of office of Judge and former President Gilbert Guillaume, whose resignation took effect on 11 February 2005.

In connection with this election, I should like to bring the following matters to the attention of the members of the General Assembly. I should like to confirm that, at this time, the Security Council, independently of the General Assembly, is also proceeding to elect one member of the Court. This procedure is in accordance with Article 8 of the Statute of the Court, which provides that

> "The General Assembly and the Security Council shall proceed independently of one another to elect the members of the Court".

Accordingly, the results of the voting in the General Assembly will not be communicated to the Security Council until one candidate has obtained the required majority in the Assembly.

I should also like to draw the attention of the Assembly to the documents relating to the election. Document A/59/683 contains a memorandum by the Secretary-General on the present composition of the Court and the procedure to be followed in the General Assembly and in the Security Council with regard to the election. Document A/59/682 contains the name of the candidate nominated by national groups within the required time for submission, that is, by 17 January 2005. I should like to inform the General Assembly that, after the deadline, the Secretariat received nominations from the national groups of Germany,

Honduras, Italy, Poland, Romania, Switzerland and Uruguay, also submitting the candidacy of Mr. Ronny Abraham. Document A/59/684 contains the curriculum vitae of the candidate nominated by national groups.

In accordance with Article 10, paragraph 1, of the Statute of the Court, the candidate who obtains an absolute majority of votes both in the General Assembly and in the Security Council shall be considered as elected.

The consistent practice of the United Nations has been to interpret the words "absolute majority" as meaning a majority of all electors whether or not they vote or are allowed to vote. The electors in the General Assembly are all 191 Member States. Accordingly, for the present election, 96 votes constitute an absolute majority in the General Assembly.

The General Assembly will now proceed to a secret ballot. If in the first ballot no candidate obtains an absolute majority, it will be necessary to proceed to further ballots until a candidate has obtained the required majority. Pursuant to the decision taken by the General Assembly at its 915th meeting, held on 16 November 1960, those ballots shall be unrestricted.

May I take it that the Assembly agrees to the procedures I have just outlined?

It was so decided.

The President (*spoke in French*): I should like to remind representatives that, pursuant to rule 88 of the rules of procedure,

> "After the President has announced the beginning of voting, no representative shall interrupt the voting except on a point of order in connection with the actual conduct of the voting".

We shall now begin the voting process. Ballot papers will now be distributed.

Representatives are requested to use only the ballot papers that are now being distributed and to place a cross to the left of the name of the candidate for whom they wish to vote. Votes may be cast only for the candidate whose name appears on the ballot papers.

At the invitation of the President, Ms. Dissing (Denmark), Ms. Abraitienė (Lithuania), Mr. Solórzano (Nicaragua), Mr. Isong (Nigeria) and Mr. Kim Kiejoo (Republic of Korea) acted as tellers.

A vote was taken by secret ballot.

The meeting was suspended at 11.20 a.m. and resumed at 12.05 p.m.

The President (*spoke in French*): The result of the voting is as follows:

Number of ballot papers:	157
Number of invalid ballots:	0
Number of valid ballots:	157
Abstentions:	3
Number of members voting:	154
Required absolute majority:	96
Number of votes obtained:	
Mr. Ronny Abraham (France)	154

Mr. Ronny Abraham has obtained an absolute majority in the General Assembly.

I have communicated the result of the voting to the President of the Security Council.

I have received a letter from the President of the Security Council. It reads as follows.

> "I have the honour to inform you that at the 5121st meeting of the Security Council, held on 15 February 2005 for the purpose of electing a member of the International Court of Justice to a term of office to expire on 5 February 2009, Mr. Ronny Abraham has obtained an absolute majority of votes."

As a result of the independent voting in the Security Council and in the General Assembly, Mr. Ronny Abraham has obtained an absolute majority in both bodies. He is therefore duly elected a member of the International Court of Justice to serve for a term commencing today, 15 February 2005, and ending on 5 February 2009. I would like to take this opportunity to extend to him the Assembly's congratulations on his election, as well as to thank the tellers for their assistance.

We have thus concluded this stage of our consideration of sub-item (c) of agenda item 15.

Agenda item 17 (*continued*)

Appointments to fill vacancies in subsidiary organs and other appointments

(h) Appointment of members of the Joint Inspection Unit

Note by the Secretary-General (A/59/108/Add.1)

The President (*spoke in French*): As indicated in document A/59/108/Add.1, as a result of the resignation of Mr. Christopher Thomas (Trinidad and Tobago), the General Assembly is required, during the fifty-ninth session, to appoint a member to fill the vacancy in the Joint Inspection Unit for a period expiring on 31 December 2008.

As also indicated in document A/59/108/Add.1, in accordance with article 3, paragraph 1, of the statute of the Joint Inspection Unit, the President of the General Assembly shall consult with Member States to draw up a list of countries — in this case, one country — which would be requested to propose a candidate for appointment to the Joint Inspection Unit.

After holding the necessary consultations, I should like to communicate to the Assembly the information received from the Chairman of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States that that Group has endorsed Peru to propose a candidate for the vacancy from among the Latin American and Caribbean States. In accordance with article 3, paragraph 1, of the statute of the Joint Inspection Unit, Peru will therefore be requested to submit the name of a candidate and the curriculum vitae highlighting the candidate's relevant qualifications for the task ahead.

After holding the appropriate consultations described in article 3, paragraph 2, of the statute of the Joint Inspection Unit, including consultations with the President of the Economic and Social Council and with the Secretary-General in his capacity as Chairman of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, I will propose a qualified candidate to the Assembly for appointment to the Joint Inspection Unit for a period expiring on 31 December 2008.

We have thus concluded this stage of our consideration of sub-item (h) of agenda item 17.

Programme of work

I would like to inform members that there is a request by some interested delegations that action on draft resolution A/59/L.16 be postponed. The Assembly will therefore take up sub-item (g) of agenda item 56 at a later date.

The meeting rose at 12.15 p.m.